How to write a strategy

Christopher M. Schnaubelt

INSIGHT

The NATO Defense College was established in 1951 in Paris based on General Dwight D. Eisenhower's suggestion that the Alliance needed an institution that could "develop individuals both on the military and on the civilian side who will have a thorough grasp of the many complicated factors which are involved in creating an adequate defense posture for the North Atlantic Treaty Area." In 1967, it moved to Rome, where it has been located since.

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About the author

Christopher M. Schnaubelt, Ph.D., is the Dean of the NATO Defense College.

Summary

Writing a strategy is difficult because the purpose is to change the behavior of humans. The most common context for strategy is in the sphere of military activities: how to apply force in a manner that breaks the will of an enemy, causing that enemy to stop fighting. However, strategy can also be useful at less intense levels of conflict such as crisis management and stability operations. Indeed, strategy can be used for peaceful but competitive purposes such as government tax policy or corporate marketing of consumer products.

This paper expresses strategy as a formula:

Strategy = Ends + Ways + Means + Risk

wherein **Ends** are the objectives or the "what" the strategy intends to accomplish; **Ways** are the strategic concepts/courses of action or the "how" that describes the methods of applying the means to attain the ends; and **Means** are the resources. **Risk** is the degree to which the Ends exceed the Ways + Means.

The following steps should be used to write a strategy. They may be performed in a different order. In most cases, some of the steps will be repeated during the development process:

- **Estimate the development timeline:** determine the deadlines for writing the strategy.

- **Develop understanding:** gather information and relate it to conditions and actors.

- **Frame the problem(s) and opportunities:** determine what is the question or problem to be solved. Questions should address internal context for the strategy development process as well as the external problem context.

- **Draft proposed ends:** envision what is to be accomplished.

- **Determine the ways and means:** compare the contemporary problem frame with the vision of what should be achieved, ascertain the set of resources that are currently available (or can reasonably be made available within the necessary time frame), and identify how these resources can be applied to produce the desired end state.

- **Consider risk:** assess whether the ends, ways, and means are in sustainable balance. The degree to which the perceived cost of Ways + Means exceeds the perceived value of the Ends is Risk.

- **Reframe the problem:** consider the likely evolution of the situation in light of proposed actions.

- **Finalize the statement of Ends, Means, and Ways:** write the strategy using the steps in this list as an outline.

- **Monitor strategy implementation and effect; revise as necessary:** assess whether the strategy is being properly implemented, is producing the expected effects, and progressing adequately towards the desired ends. If not, revise the strategy or the plans and/or activities that implement the strategy.

Introduction

> "The nineteenth-century Italian poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), wrote the much quoted line, 'happy is the land that needs no heroes.' He might have written, to the same effect, 'happy is the land that needs no strategists.' Unfortunately, the polities that need no such strategists are rare. Despite the richness of demand for strategic performance, the supply of excellence, or even just competence, more often than not is lacking."
>
> **-- Colin S. Gray**[1]

The quote at top implies that the requirement for strategy exceeds the supply of people who have been trained to be strategists. Thus, this paper is a "how to" guide intended to fill the need for a relatively brief overview of strategy and provide a template for its development.

The most common context for strategy is in the sphere of military activities: how to apply force in a manner that breaks the will of an enemy, causing that enemy to stop fighting. But it is not just military organizations that can benefit from strategic competence. As NATO implements its concept for Multi-Domain Operations,[2] which will be described later, the need for strategic planning will increase not only for military officers but also for civilian experts from the diplomatic, informational, and economic spheres as well as other sources of non-military power who must combine their efforts to achieve common defense and security goals more effectively.

Indeed, strategy can be used for peaceful but competitive purposes such as government tax policy or corporate marketing of consumer products. Although their desired outcomes, available resources, and methods of operation may vary greatly, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and government bodies concerned with capacity development or purely domestic policy issues should also find useful the framework and process presented here.[3] To illustrate the wide variety of circumstances in which strategy can be useful, this paper includes examples from the fields of business and domestic policy as well as war. It also includes brief discussions of other approaches to developing strategy to present the reader with potential alternatives. Extensive footnotes and an annotated bibliography provide the reader with recommendations for additional study.

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1   *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 136.
2   See NATO Allied Command Transformation, "Multi-Domain Operations in NATO – Explained," webpage dated October 5, 2023: https://www.act.nato.int/article/mdo-in-nato-explained/ (accessed January 11, 2024).
3   Masters of Business Administration degree programs often include courses on strategy. Large for-profit firms that provide strategy consulting services to businesses and governments include McKinsey & and Company and Deloitte. For example, see https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-business-strategy, https://www.mckinsey.com/, and https://www2.deloitte.com/tr/en/pages/strategy-operations/solutions/strategy-consulting.html. (accessed October 31, 2023)

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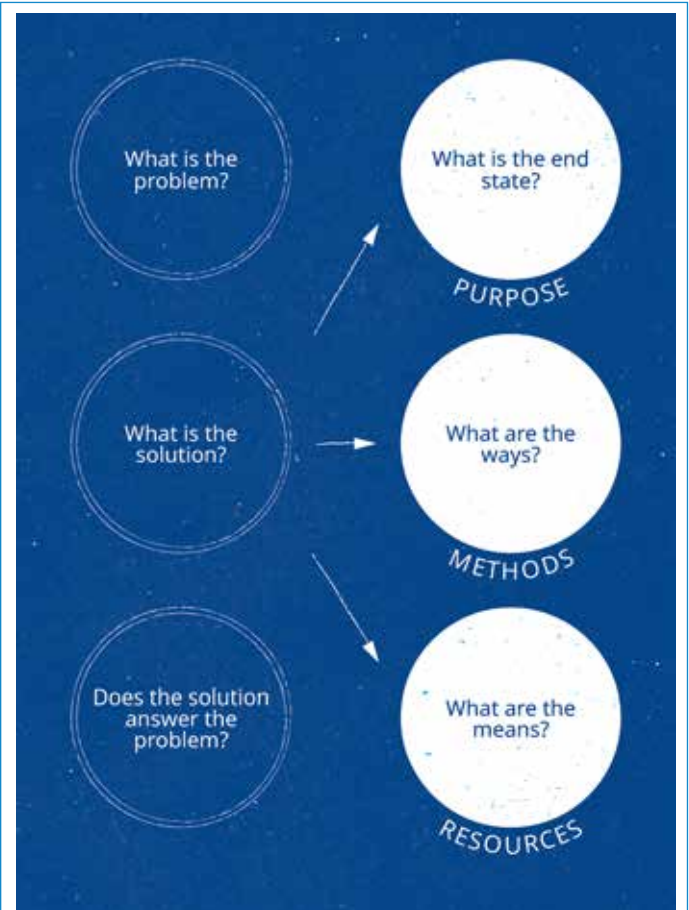# What to do if tasked to write a strategy?

Source: Jack D. Kem, *Campaign Planning: Tools of the Trade*, 3rd ed., Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2009, p. 5, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA550354.pdf (accessed December 15, 2023).

This paper approaches developing a strategy as a problem-solving process. Readers who began this paper at the summary have already seen the list of steps for writing a strategy and may find them sufficient. However, developing an effective strategy requires knowing something *about* strategy.[4]

Therefore, this paper is more than just a checklist of steps for writing a strategy. It provides a set of cognitive tools to give a burgeoning strategist enough help to "fill in the blanks" and complete the recommended steps if told to write a strategy. The remainder is organized thus:

1. A brief review of the definitional problems of strategy and a formula that will help the reader to understand the requirement if told to write a strategy.
2. An overview of some approaches to teaching strategy that will provide an appreciation of the requirements for developing expertise.
3. A discussion of key considerations when writing a strategy.
4. A discussion of the role of context.
5. An overview of the comprehensive approach, to help frame the challenges of attaining a unified approach to addressing significant problems.

6. A brief analysis of the relationship between the comprehensive approach and NATO's emerging concept for Multi-Domain Operations.
7. A step-by-step description of how to write a strategy.
8. Some concluding thoughts to wrap up the preceding discussions.
9. An appendix describing some of the key concepts in military strategy.
10. An appendix with three examples of strategies.
11. An annotated bibliography to provide recommended reading for readers interested in additional study on this topic.

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4   For those deeply interested in the subject of strategy, this article will present an amuse bouche. One may reasonably ask: "how much knowledge is enough?" The logical response is: "how much time do you have?" As may be seen in some later examples, a thorough education regarding strategy typically involves extensive study.

2

What is strategy?

A good starting point for the strategic novice is to determine what she or he is being asked to develop. There are numerous definitions of strategy,[5] as well as a surprisingly large number of works on strategy that do not provide an explicit definition but either expect readers to infer its meaning from the discussion or assume they are already familiar with the term. Within the security literature, there is also considerable debate on levels of strategy; some authors identify distinctions between related concepts such as "strategy," "theater strategy," "national strategy," and "grand strategy."

One might add "total strategy" to this list. General André Beaufre, known as "the father of contemporary French strategic thought and required reading at French military schools," argued that "the only good strategy… is total." By "total strategy," Beaufre meant that politics must drive military action with strategies developed by politicians rather than military officers.[6]

The question "what is strategy?" is not merely semantic, but for purposes of this paper it is sufficient to treat "strategy" and "grand strategy" as synonymous and to provide a handful of definitions as examples. (Several of the works listed in the bibliography explore the issue in depth for those who are interested in further detail.)

Colin S. Gray differentiates "strategy" – which he argues is a permanent theoretical construct with an unchanging nature – from "strategies" – which change in character (versus nature) and must be adaptive to contextual elements such as geography, technology, and specific adversaries.[7] Such a hypothesis is outside the scope of this monograph, which does not attempt to make this theory-based distinction. It instead focuses on the practical application of how to write a strategy.[8] Accordingly, the approach here is that the function of writing a strategy may be performed at multiple levels with different strategies nested within one another.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines strategy as "the science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to

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5   For a summary of the definitional problem, see J. Boone Bartholomees, "A Survey of the Theory of Strategy" in The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume I: Theory of War and Strategy, J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. (editor), Strategic Studies Institute, June 2012, pp. 13-44. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12116.5 (accessed September 6, 2023).
6   Michael Shurkin, "Grand Strategy is Total: French Gen, André Beaufre on War in the Nuclear Age," War on the Rocks, October 8, 2020, https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/grand-strategy-is-total-french-gen-andre-beaufre-on-war-in-the-nuclear-age/ (accessed October 10, 2023)
7   The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice (Op. Cit.), pp. 15-19.
8   Some amount of theory, however, is necessary to inform practice and create understanding of process.

adopted policies in peace or war."[9] According to business professors Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes, "Strategy is the *direction* and *scope* of an organisation over the *long-term*: which achieves *advantage* for the organisation through its configuration of *resources* within a challenging *environment*, to meet the needs of *markets* and to fulfil *stakeholder* expectations."[10]

One of the most succinct definitions is offered by J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., who calls it "simply a problem solving process."[11] Somewhat more expansive, according to Shawn Brimley: "Strategy is the art of connecting aspirations with prudent plans and finite resources."[12] One of the most brilliant strategists of the Cold War era, Bernard Brodie, wrote that "Strategy is 'how to do it' study, a guide to accomplishing something and doing it efficiently."[13]

Along similar lines, John Lewis Gaddis tells us that "[strategy] is the calculated relationship of means to large ends." Expanding upon this concept, he writes:

> "It's about how one uses whatever one has to get wherever it is one wants to go. Our knowledge of it derives chiefly from the realm of war and statecraft, because the fighting of wars and the management of states have demanded the calculation of relationships between means and ends for a longer stretch of time than any other documented areas of collective human activity… But [strategy] need not apply only to war and statecraft: it's potentially applicable to any endeavor in which means must be deployed in pursuit of important ends."[14]

Each of the preceding definitions has both value and limitations.[15] Nevertheless, I propose the following working definition based upon the model developed by Arthur Lykke:

Strategy is a statement that unambiguously[16] defines the ends that are to be achieved, the means that will be employed to achieve those ends, and the ways in which those means will be used.

This can also be expressed as a formula: Strategy = Ends + Ways + Means + Risk, wherein ends are the objectives or the "what" the strategy intends to accomplish; ways are the strategic concepts/courses of action or the "how" that describes the methods of applying the means to attain the ends; and means are the resources. Risk is the extent to which the Ends exceed the Ways + Means, therefore the formula can also be expressed as Ends = Ways + Means + Risk.

In a security context, means are typically elements of national power such as diplomatic, informational, military, and economic assets that will be used to attain the ends. In other contexts, these might be institutional capacity building programs, capital, education, technical expertise, advertising, or many other assets available to international organizations, non-governmental organizations, development agencies, or businesses. Ways in a military strategy might include conducting combat operations, forming alliances, developing the capacity of partner militaries through the provision of training, equipment, and advice; conducting cyber operations, or a myriad of other ways to use resources.

Expressing strategy as a formula, however, does not mean that it is a simple exercise or can be written automatically. As will be seen below, the crux of the matter is determining the specifics to fill in the parts of the formula. To illustrate the need for human involvement – at least this point in time regarding the development of artificial intelligence (AI), I posed the following query to ChatGPT on January 8, 2024: "What should be NATO's strategy for Russia?" The result is pasted below.[17]

One of the challenges of contemporary AI is that it must draw from existing data sets. Thus, the "strategy" suggested above seems to be a compilation of public statements by NATO officials. It does not present new

9   http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strategy (accessed September 6, 2023).

10   Gerry Johnson et al., *Exploring Corporate Strategy: Text and Cases*, (London: Financial Times/Prentice Hall, 2006).

11   "A Survey of the Theory of Strategy" (Op. Cit.), pp. 13-43.

12   "Crafting Strategy in an Age of Transition," *Parameters* (Winter 2008-09), pp. 27-42: https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol38/iss4/2/ (accessed September 6, 2023).

13   *War and Politics*, London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1973, p. 452.

14   "What is Grand Strategy" (Op. Cit.), p. 7. Gaddis uses the term "grand strategy" rather than "strategy," but a discussion regarding the potential distinction between the two is not necessary for the purposes of this monograph.

15   For a negative example, consider the Tupamoro terrorist group that was eventually defeated by the government of Uruguay in the 1970s: when asked to explain his group's strategy, a leader replied: "I cannot give you a detailed strategy. However, one can give some general strategic principles by the day, month, and year as one encounters them" (Michael Radu and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Latin American Revolutionaries: Groups, Goals, Methods*. New York: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1990), pp. 11-12.

16   There may be instances where an ambiguous statement of the desired ends may be useful for rhetorical purposes or as a negotiating tactic, but it is difficult to identify cases where this has been successful in the context of a democracy or in an alliance of democratic states such as NATO. Perhaps there is no theoretical reason a strategy must be written (in *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, listed in the bibliography, Edward Luttwak infers ancient Roman strategy from their behavior rather than anything they wrote as such), but in our era it is necessary for practical reasons – especially during multi-agency efforts such as a comprehensive approach where it is necessary to reduce the risks from partners having different and potentially conflicting goals.

17   Text generated by ChatGPT, January 8, 2024, OpenAI, https://chat.openai.com/chat.

and innovative ideas, much less explicit and actionable recommendations on what NATO is – or should be – trying to achieve, what resources it should apply, and how to apply those resources[18]

> **11:14** ☊   ⦙⦙⦙ 5G 89
>
> ☰   **ChatGPT** >   ✎
>
> **(CM) You**
> What should be NATO's strategy for Russia?
>
> **⊛ ChatGPT**
> NATO's strategy toward Russia involves a delicate balance of deterrence, dialogue, and defense. It typically revolves around maintaining a strong defensive posture, reinforcing alliances, engaging in diplomatic talks when possible, and deterring any aggressive actions from Russia through a combination of military readiness and political pressure. This includes reinforcing the eastern flank, supporting member states, and pursuing dialogue to mitigate tensions and prevent escalation.

18   "Engaging in diplomatic talks when possible" might seem like a "way" but is a cliché that can be applied to virtually any security situation and thus of little practical use. To strive for efficiency and effectiveness is a common but similarly vapid recommendation.

3

A sample of approaches to teaching strategy

The concept of something called strategy dates back thousands of years.[19] However, Lorenzo Ruiz argues that *teaching* strategy as an element of military education is a Prussian creation that was one of the reforms resulting from a "humiliating" defeat by Napoleon at the battle of Jena-Auerstedt – a loss that occurred despite Prussia having a force nearly twice the size of the French.[20]

When considering the approach to developing strategy that is presented in this paper, readers might logically wonder how strategy is taught elsewhere. A complete survey of professional military education on strategy within all NATO members and elsewhere is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the range of such efforts might be illustrated with five examples: two nations that require the completion of substantial formal education in strategy prior to selection as a general or flag officer, and three nations that do not.[21]

> " **War is not an affair of chance. A great deal of knowledge, study and meditation is necessary to conduct it well.**

-- Frederick the Great: Instructions for His Generals, 1747

France. The French Professional Military Education system is not very different from those to be found in the United States or in the United Kingdom. Based on a strict selection process, it aims at providing future leaders with the mandatory knowledge to operate in a future contested environment, both at an operational and geopolitical level.

At the level of senior colonel, a class of approximately twenty officers earmarked for future key positions are selected to attend the *Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires* (Centre for High Military Studies). As part of this program, they also attend the *Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale* (Institute of Advanced Studies in National Defence or IHEDN). The IHEDN is a public institution with an interagency dimension, placed under the supervision of the French Prime Minister's Office. Since its foundation in 1936, it has been entrusted with the responsibility to contribute to a better understanding of defence-related issues and to the development of strategic thinking.

Each year, IHEDN gathers for its senior course more than 280 course members selected from across government entities and the private sector. This part time course – ranging between 40 and 50 days according to the chosen electives – is based on a broad diversity of profiles and sectors, including military officers, government officials, members of Parliament, industrial managers and civil society members, IHEDN has adopted a very specific methodology to develop critical thinking and a better knowledge of strategy, in all its forms. From

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19 For example, see Eliot Cohen, "Strategy in antiquity," *Britannica* undated webpage, https://www.britannica.com/topic/strategy-military/Strategy-in-antiquity (accessed November 2, 2023).

20 "The Roots of Modern Military Education," *The Strategy Bridge*, July 17, 2018, https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2018/7/17/the-roots-of-modern-military-education (accessed October 9, 2023).

21 In statistics terminology, this is a convenience sample. The information was gathered through NDC faculty and staff members from the relevant nations.

grand strategy, its linkages with both the military and diplomatic instruments, their subordination to identified political goals, to specific approaches through the lenses of actors, the program aims to help course members to better understand the essence of strategy as a dialectic. The senior course is divided into five *Majeures* all having their specificities: Defense Policy, Armament and Defense Economy, Maritime Strategies, Cyber, and Defense and Economic Sovereignty. This year-long course aims to develop knowledge of why Defense and Security are important to France amongst influential civilian government officials, future policy makers and industrial leaders, as well as public opinion influencers.

In addition, at a moment where strategic thinking is more needed than ever, all Ecole militaire-based doctrine, education and training centers have deployed a common initiative called ACADEM (*Académie de defense de l'Ecole militaire*). It aims at empowering stakeholders, future leaders, and thinkers by creating an enduring hub between academics and practitioners while maximizing synergies with techniques such as wargaming.

The United States.
The 2009 syllabus for the two-semester course at Yale University on Grand Strategy taught by Professors John Lewis Gaddis, Charles Hill, Paul Kennedy, Walter Russell Mead, and Paul Solman requires a summer research project with international travel as well as dozens of books with thousands of pages of readings in the Spring semester alone. Even with this reading load, Gaddis states that the students are only "superficially" exposed to classic works such as those by Thucydides, Sun Tzu, and Machiavelli.[22]

U.S. military officers are typically selected to attend a war college as lieutenant colonels (or commanders for naval officers) through a competitive process.[23] Graduates of the U.S. Army War College are military professionals who are expected to be familiar with the development of strategy and the major strategic theories although they are not expert strategists themselves. Even the considerable reading load for a typical U.S. Army War College student is merely an "introduction to strategy." The 2014 reading list for students at the U.S. Army War College, for example, included two volumes of collected articles on "The-

ory of War and Strategy" and "National Security Policy" that exceed 600 pages.[24] Those who specialize in strategy – "Strategic Plans & Policies" officers – U.S. Army officers in the Functional Area-59 career field[25] – must complete substantial additional requirements in mid-career that include an intensive fourteen week graduate level course called the Basic Strategic Art Program and when attending the U.S. Army War College are expected to also enroll in the Advanced Strategic Art Program.

Naturally, the other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces have similar institutions, and the National War College is an inter-service program. These U.S. military institutions are collectively known as the "Senior Service Colleges." The other government organization whose primary role is carrying out U.S. national security policy, the Department of State, has no equivalent professional education program of its own but sends a limited number of career diplomats to attend one of the military Senior Service Colleges.

The intended audience for the courses taught at Yale by Professor Gaddis et al are students at one of America's most elite universities, some of whom will presumably go on to be influential civilian government officials and policy makers.[26] Indeed, civilians who understand strategy might have become increasingly in demand if the goals of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, as evinced in the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, came to be realized. The 2010 QDDR presented a vision of "Leading through Civilian Power" with Chiefs of Mission (ambassadors) performing as "CEOs of a multi-agency effort." The QDDR noted that one of the key steps that must be accomplished in order to realize its goals is to: "…develop a high-level strategic planning process, strategies for regional and functional bureaus, and Integrated Country Strategies that bring together all country-level planning for diplomacy, development, and broader foreign assistance into a single, overarching strategy." However, the concept of a QDDR did not survive into the next U.S. presidential administration.[27]

22 John Lewis Gaddis, "What is Grand Strategy," lecture at Duke University, February 26, 2009, https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/grandstrategypaper.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023). This is not meant to suggest that either the U.S. Army or Yale programs are the ideal models for teaching strategy, but to give an idea of the amount of study that certain programs feel are required to become thoroughly familiar with the topic. Additionally, these examples should help balance the risk that the brief outline for developing strategy that is presented here inadvertently oversimplifies what is actually an extremely complex and difficult endeavor in terms of content if not process.

23 For a complete review of the U.S. Professional Military Education system, see Charles A. Goldman, et al., *Intellectual Firepower: A Review of Professional Military Education in the U.S. Department of Defense,* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2024. Available for free download at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA1600/RRA1694-1/RAND_RRA1694-1.pdf (accessed January 8, 2024).

24 See https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12116 and https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12023 (accessed September 6, 2023).

25 See https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2023/02/28/1fd5abfc/fa-59-strategist-da-pam-600-3-as-of-1-apr-20.pdf (accessed December 15, 2023).

26 For a short list of academic programs on strategy see Thierry Balzacq and Ronald R. Krebs, *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy,* Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 15.

27 It is unclear what – if anything – the Department of State had done in practical terms to develop the proposed strategy development capabilities within its diplomatic corps. It was initially hoped that the QDDR would persuade the U.S. Congress to provide additional funding for these efforts. The political reality, however, is that bringing this vision to fruition would have required making the development of strategic planning capacity a Secretary of State-level priority and shifting the funds from other programs and/or taking better advantage of the extant professional military education programs in the Department of Defense – or better yet, establishment of a U.S. Government interagency education program on strategy, perhaps similar to the French IHEDN, which includes parliamentarians and other civilians.

Germany. After their first leadership positions, German officers attend the Field Officer Basic Course at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College, which includes elements of strategic thinking.

Those staff officers selected to attend the National General/Admiral Staff Officer Course (about 20%) at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College (*Führungsakademie* / Hamburg) receive education in strategic thinking as part of their leadership training and qualification. In appointments at the OF4/5 level, selected officers participate in national and partner-countries' courses, such as those in the UK, France, or the U.S. War College. A key component of strategic training includes further education during leadership assignments. Training focused only on strategy is not mandatory and opportunities for such education are limited.

The German professional military development includes strategic thinking as an element of professional training and education programs progressively throughout an officer's career, and not as a separate training focused solely on strategy.

Denmark. Professional military education of Danish officers is standardized, taught by military institutions, and covers only military-specific skills until officers reach the rank of captain.[28] To become promoted to major, officers must be selected for advanced education and complete a master's degree. The majority obtain a Master of Military Studies degree from the Danish Defense College. However, some attend civilian universities and receive master's degrees in technical subjects related to their military career field, such as computer science or engineering. The Master of Military Science curriculum includes a module on strategy but there are no specific career tracks for strategists. The Danish Defense College strategy module consists of two weeks of in-person lectures/discussions and three self-study periods each lasting three or four weeks.

The Netherlands. The topics of strategy, strategic thinking and strategy making are mostly dealt with in the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA) that is responsible for primary level PME (Military Academy, Naval Academy), second level (Joint Staff Course) and the third level Top Level Defence Course. Service institutes may add to that. Cadet officers at the NLDA who follow the Military Sciences Study bachelor degree (roughly one third of all cadets) are introduced to strategy through the Military Strategy Studies programme. Mid-level officers selected for the Netherlands Joint Staff Course will receive a strategy module while some others may be sent to equivalent foreign Staff Colleges (USA, UK, DEU, BEL, FRA). At the level of Colonel, the Top Level Defence course brings together military and civilian officials. Its focus is political-military/civilian-military and strategy is dealt with

in a very generic way. A select few at colonel-level can be sent to foreign War- and Defence Colleges (such as USA, UK, FRA and NDC). There is no specific career path for strategists. But like Germany, one can say that critical and strategic thinking is an element of progressive PME.

> " Strategy formation is not typically taught in undergraduate business school. It is only uniformly offered in graduate business schools and unfortunately, is a priority in very few. Those with keen interest can access the foundational elements of strategy development while pursuing their MBA, but most will acquire the skill on the job at the director level and with the help of an experienced mentor. NielsenIQ, a leading consumer research firm used the director level/experienced mentor model to create their pan-Africa strategy. They constrained the strategy to geography, scope of offering and level of profitability leading to tactics that led the firm to concentrate in Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya with a product focus on syndicated consumer buying behavior and custom product research but only where profitability levels could reach a demanding level. Steve Mathesen, the current Chief Strategy Officer at NielsenIQ mentored this strategy development in what is typical for a successful strategy formation and implementation effort in the private sector.

--**Allen Burch**
Former Managing Director for Africa,
The Nielsen Company
(email to author)

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28   "OF-2" in NATO parlance.

4

Considerations when writing a strategy

Despite being summarized above as a formula, developing strategy is an intellectual process that primarily entails art rather than science.[29] This characteristic obtains because the conditions that produced the need for a strategy will always be dynamic and interactive. As John Collins has put it, "[strategy] is not a game that states can play by themselves."[30] The purpose of strategy is to shape behavior; the group or actor whose behavior is the object will react in often unexpected ways as the strategy is implemented.

> ## "If you don't have a strategy, you're part of someone else's strategy."
>
> **-- Alvin Toffler**

This holds true even if the situation is not purely competitive. In a security context, the requirement for strategy is generated by a thinking, adaptive adversary who will react and change its own strategy according to the pro-

gress of a war or other armed conflict. Yet the same dynamic nature applies in highly cooperative situations such as those involving domestic populations whose behavior a government intends to influence through public policy. People will change their behavior in reaction to tax policy, urban planning regulations, gas taxes, or health care laws even if promulgated by a government they perceive to be entirely legitimate.

Sometimes the intent of such policies is purely to raise revenue or reduce costs, but intentionally or not, they will virtually always have an impact upon behavior – and not necessarily the impact that was intended.

Thus, implementing a peaceful, domestic political or governmental strategy also involves reaction as well as action. What does this example have to do with strategy? It illustrates that human beings will respond to changes in their situation in ways that are often difficult to anticipate. A good strategy must take into consideration this dynamic.[31]

> ## In reaction to the much higher accident rates among 16- and 17-year old drivers, in the past few decades many American states have implemented stringent new educational prerequisites before issuing licenses to people in this age group. However, an unintended consequence is that many youths are waiting until age 18 to get their driver's license so they can avoid these requirements; the accident rate among 18-year olds has

29 For this reason, there is an emerging view that strategy should be "designed" rather than "developed" or "planned" but there is no need to debate this interesting question within the scope of this particular monograph.

30 Quoted in Colin S. Gray, Schools for Strategy: Teaching Strategy for 21st Century Conflict, Strategic Studies Institute, November 2009, 2, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1612&context=monographs (accessed September 6, 2023).

31 In other words, are the Ways likely achieve the desired Ends if provided sufficient Means?

subsequently skyrocketed. It may well be that the new laws merely increased the average age of drivers who have accidents without reducing the net number of traffic accidents.

-- **USA Today**,
"Youth driver's licenses have drawback,"
September 14, 2011, p. 3A

Understanding the motivations, culture, and beliefs of adversary individuals and groups can reduce the risk of unintended consequences within the security sphere, but because they are collectives of human beings, the behavior of states is also frequently unpredictable. As an example, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's failure to dissuade North Vietnam from attacking South Vietnam through a quasi-scientific and formulaic application of graduated military force (calculated by his subordinates consisting of the "Best and the Brightest"[32] from America's top universities) seems to illustrate this assertion. How else to explain America's defeat by a state that possessed only a tiny fraction of U.S. military and economic power?

For this reason, it is critical that developers of a strategy consider the second- and third-order effects (i.e. the action-reaction cycle of thinking human beings) that their implementation of ways and means will produce. It may be trite but is nonetheless true that in armed conflict "the enemy gets a vote."

Equally true in terms of domestic policy, citizens will react to strategies that intend to raise revenue or shape behavior with changes to their work and spending habits as well as voting at the ballot box and/or "with their feet" by moving to another jurisdiction. Recognizing this dynamic, several American states currently have active campaigns that try to lure businesses from states with higher taxes and regulatory costs by advertising a supposedly more advantageous business and economic climate.[33] Similarly, even within the European Union member states establish their own tax policies.[34] Differences in corporate income tax rates can make some nations more attractive to business compared to others. Ireland has benefited from competitive tax rates that have resulted in a three-fold increase in corporate tax revenues due to investments from U.S. companies seeking more competitive rates.[35]

Again, if even peaceful attempts by democratic governments face challenges with domestic policy intended to cause changes in hard to predict human behavior, imagine the difficulty of trying to anticipate the outcome of the use of force against another nation or violent non-state actors.

As will be described further in the process recommended below, developing strategy is usually an iterative activity. Very rarely, if ever, can a strategy in pursuit of important ends be developed, tasked for implementation, and then be placed on a high shelf and forgotten in the expectation that it will be autonomously carried out to fruition. Yet, there is a tension between the need for a strategy to be forward looking and far reaching and the requirement to track its implementation and adjust when needed.

> **1. You are hereby designated as Supreme Allied Commander of the forces placed under your orders for operations for liberation of Europe from Germans. Your title will be Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force.**

> **2. Task. You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces. The date for entering the Continent is the month of May, 1944. After adequate channel ports have been secured, exploitation will be directed towards securing an area that will facilitate both ground and air operations against the enemy.**

**From the directive to
General Eisenhower, February 12, 1944**

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32   See David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (London: Penguin Books, 1983). Available at: https://archive.org/details/bestbrightest00halb_0/ (accessed October 9, 2023).
33   And, successful businesses are well aware that consumers can choose the products of competitors.
34   Sean Bray, "Corporate Income Tax Rates in Europe," February 22, 2022, https://taxfoundation.org/data/all/eu/corporate-tax-rates-europe-2022/ (accessed October 9, 2023).
35   Paul Hannon, "This Country Won the Global Tax Game, and Is Swimming in Money," Wall Street Journal October 10, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/economy/global/this-country-won-the-global-tax-game-and-is-swimming-in-money-57c3c70?st=dmlms9ba6zoa93q&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink (accessed October 11, 2023).

On the one hand, a good strategy is usually big, bold, and at a high conceptual level so that it does not require constant tweaking and reformulation. A typical time frame will encompass years rather than days. Creating the means may take a long time before they can be employed, especially in a security context when they entail recruiting, training, and educating personnel, creating doctrine, or building aircraft, ships, and missile systems or other resources that require long lead times to produce.[36] Advanced technological tools may give a nation a great advantage, but as MacGregor Knox has written, "… machines need an inordinate time for their development, tend by their nature towards specialization, and require time-consuming adjustment to fit into integrated "weapons systems" needed to crush or counter the 'systems' of potential enemies."[37] Thus, a good strategy will usually have an enduring quality. This is especially true when subordinate organizations must develop detailed plans to execute the strategy. Changing a strategy too frequently will disrupt its implementation.

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36 For example, American planning sorely underestimated the amount of time that would be needed to create effective and reliable national security forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

37 "Conclusion: Continuity and Revolution in the Making of Strategy" in William Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 641.

5

Context and strategy

Develop Understanding is the second – and probably most complicated – step in the process of writing a strategy. The strategist gathers information on current conditions, the key actors involved, and relates the parts of the system to one another. If this step is done poorly, the rest of the strategy is likely to fall apart.

Situations that require a strategy, such as those involving a comprehensive approach, will often be "wicked problems" that experience systemic shifts in unpredictable ways due to the inputs that flow from execution of the strategy.[38] The actions that result from implementing a strategy (or sometimes merely from the object of the strategy becoming cognizant of the strategy – as in the case of declaratory nuclear policy) can cause the problem set to change such that the desired ends are not realized and the ways and/or means are no longer the most appropriate for the evolved situation.

	Well-Structured "Puzzle"	Medium-Structured "Structurally Complex Problem"	Ill-Structured "Wicked Problem"
Problem Structuring	The problem is self-evident. Structuring is trivial.	Professionals easily agree on its structure.	Professionals will have difficulty agreeing on problem structure and will have to agree on a shared starting hypothesis.
Solution Development	There is only one right solution. It may be difficult to find.	There may be more than one "right" answer. Professionals may disagree on the best solution. Desired end state can be agreed.	Professionals will disagree on: • How the problem can be solved. • The most desirable end state. • Whether it can be attained.
Execution of Solution	Success requires learning to perfect technique.	Success requires learning to perfect technique and adjust solution.	Success requires learning to perfect technique, adjust solution, and refine problem framing.
Adaptive Iteration	No adaptive iteration required.	Adaptive iteration is required to find the best solution.	Adaptive iteration is required both to refine problem structure and to find the best solution.

Types of problems and solution strategies[39]

As the problem, situation, or threat evolves or reacts, the means necessary and/or ways they are employed will usually need to be adjusted to fit these changes. Additionally, as the costs of executing the strategy become clearer, the desired ends might be reconceived.

During the Korean War, for example, the U.S. and its United Nations Command allies shifted the desired end several times as the perceived costs of achieving it changed.[40]

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38 For an overview on wicked problems, see "Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective," Australian Public Service Commission, 2007, https://library.nzfvc.org.nz/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=5347 (accessed September 6, 2023). From Figure 1-1, U.S. Army TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500, Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design, January 28, 2008, p. 9, https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/p525-5-500.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

39 From Figure 1-1, U.S. Army TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500, Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design, January 28, 2008, p. 9, https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/p525-5-500.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

40 This is, of course, a very simplified summary of events. For in-depth studies, see Roy E. Appleman, South to the Nakton, North to the Yalu and Walter G. Hermes, Truce Tent and the Fighting Front. Washington, DC.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1992. Available for free download at: https://history.army.mil/books/korea/20-2-1/toc.htm and https://history.army.mil/books/korea/truce/fm.htm (accessed September 6, 2023).

Initially, the goal was merely a return to the *status quo ante bellum* and restoring the independence of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). In the wake of MacArthur's spectacular advance to the Yalu River, the goal changed to completely defeating the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). However, following the Chinese intervention and the rout of MacArthur's over-extended forces, the desired end shifted back to maintaining the independence of South Korea and restoration of the pre-war boundaries.[41] Arguably, this is an example of successfully shifting the ends in the face of unanticipated costs – in other words, bringing the ends into balance with the ways + means – whereas the U.S. defeats in the Vietnam War and Afghanistan were due to a failure to align the ends with ways and a level of means that would be acceptable to the American public.

As Colin Gray argues, strategy is developed within a context of "political, social-cultural, economic, technological, military, geographical (geopolitical and geostrategic), and historical" factors.[42] This is illustrated by the figure above, to which I have added human individuals as a significant factor.

This context impacts the development of strategy in multiple aspects. It will determine who is chosen to develop the strategy in question, determine the stakeholders the strategist(s) must report to, and defines the problem set – to include existing and potential influences upon the behavior of the actor the strategy is going to target. It will also determine what ways are acceptable to the individuals who must approve as well as those who must carry out the strategy, and what will ultimately be "workable" solutions to the problems the strategy is intended to address.

These factors will have different relative weights in different situations. Identifying their nature and how they interact with each other is a key aspect of developing "understanding" of the situation, which is discussed below.

It is also important to note that strategy, as conceived in this monograph, is purposive rather than expressive. Strategy is developed with the intention of achieving specific outcomes, described as "ends" within the development process described later. It is not about taking

Source: *The Strategy Bridge*, Colin S. Gray.

action for its own sake.[43] Yet paradoxically, the desire to "feel good" about "doing something" may be among the motivations of strategists and policy makers. Furthermore, the International Relations Theory literature contains robust debates concerning instances of policy makers apparently implementing foreign policy decisions for purposes of domestic politics.[44] This observation suggests another factor making it more complex to assess how an adversary might respond to the implementation of a strategy.

It is extremely unlikely that a democratically elected leader will publicly admit taking military action overseas primarily for the purpose of increasing his popularity at home.[45] Even domestic policy decisions are almost always framed in terms of improving the "public good" rather than courting a particular political constituen-

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41   Interestingly, the North Koreans were also surprised by the U.S. intervention following their initial invasion of the South. The U.S. Secretary of State had previously declared in public that the Korean Peninsula was not within the U.S. sphere of interests.

42   *The Strategy Bridge*, 38-39. Although repeatedly recognizing their importance throughout the book, Gray explicitly chooses not to include the human individual among the factors (which he terms as "contexts" in the plural, but I prefer a construct that proposes a set of "factors" that collectively form a single context in which a particular strategy is developed). In my opinion, individuals can make such an important difference they must be included in any model of strategy. For example, I have argued that General David Petraeus (and Ambassador Ryan Crocker) personally played such a significant role in designing and implementing the 2007 "surge" in Iraq that virtually any other commanding general would not have achieved the same level of success. (See my online debate with Gian Gentile in the comments section below the article by Peter Feaver at: https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/the-right-to-be-right-civil-military-relations-and-the-iraq-surge-decision. Accessed September 6, 2023.)

43   Although in some cultures, "honor" may be an end in itself.

44   The 1997 film "Wag the Dog" was based on this premise. Non-fictional examples abound. The brilliant book by H.R. McMaster, Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) describes in detail how domestic political considerations deeply affected national security policy – and military advice – resulting in U.S. escalation of the war in Vietnam. More recently, see Ben Smith, "The domestic politics of Libya, in France" at: http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0311/The_domestic_politics_of_Libya_in_Frnace.html (accessed September 6, 2023).

45   Daniel Shultz argues that Putin's latest war on Ukraine is primarily aimed at control of the Russian populace. See "Who controls the past controls the future: How Russia uses history for cognitive warfare," Outlook No. 4, NATO Defense College, December 2023, https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1901 (accessed December 15, 2023).

cy. Yet if a strategy seeks conflicting goals (some of which may be hidden), it risks internal incoherence. Or if it must compete with other strategies that purport to advance the interests of the same or overlapping groups of stakeholders, at least some of the desired outcomes will probably go awry. This holds especially true for the strategies of a political-military alliance like NATO.

The literature on security strategy focuses primarily on the nature of the adversary, but the internal factors in which the developers of strategy must operate – their own varying biases and potentially conflicting interests of their stakeholders – also form an important part of the context. As Carl Builder persuasively argued using the U.S. Army as an example, institutional interests or "personalities" can strongly influence their input to national strategy.[46] In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu asserted it was vital not only to know your enemies but also yourself. An understanding of the range of interests and the areas of overlap and potential dissonance within an alliance or coalition effort is necessary to design a strategy that can be implemented in pursuit of the collective ends.[47] Even the embassy/mission in a single country can have conflicting interests. Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne give as an example: "The desire of an agricultural attaché to dispose of the United States' surplus grain might not easily be reconciled with the endeavors of the representative of [the U.S. Agency for International Development] to promote local self-sufficiency in food production."[48]

During counterinsurgency and stability operations, differences between goals and methods preferred by military units compared to those of non-governmental organizations can be particularly problematic. For example, many humanitarian actors place a premium on neutrality and will attempt to serve the entire population equally without making judgments regarding any of the sides in a conflict. Conversely, military activities in such operations are usually intended to defeat a certain enemy or enable the victory of a particular side in a conflict. Such incongruities must be identified and mitigated.

International development guides and handbooks, including several by the United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, and UK's Department for International Development (DFID) repeatedly state the need for effective strategy and list strategy as an important factor in organizational assessments yet never clearly define the term.[49] Furthermore, as seen in the chart below, they tend to view strategy as part of the context that acts upon inputs and influences outputs and outcomes rather than an overarching, holistic construct directed towards achieving specific ends.

Open systems model of capacity development

Source: David Wilson, Promoting Institutional and Organisational Development: A Guide, Department for International Development, March 2003, Figure 4, p. 2. Available at: https://nsagm.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/0/3/12030125/institutional_development_sourcebook_dfid_2003.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

This view is not necessarily in conflict with the approach taken in this monograph if one recognizes there can be strategies within strategies. In the above model, strategy inside the circle should be viewed as that of the organizations or institutions that are targeted for developmental capacity-building intervention. Outside actors like International Organizations (e.g. UN Development Programme, World Bank), Non-Governmental Organizations (e.g. Oxfam International, Médecins Sans Frontières), or aid agencies of national governments such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the U.S. Agency for International

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46 Carl H. Builder, The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
47 Military action by alliances and coalitions seem to be at particular risk for a divergence of interests that can inhibit a creating a sound collective strategy.
48 The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory, and Administration (New York: Routledge, 2011, second edition), 219.
49 DFID provides a circular definition: "How the organisation implements its mission and vision via a clear stakeholder focused strategy, supported by relevant policies, plans, objectives, targets and processes." See David Wilson and Lindsay Beaton, Promoting Institutional & Organisational Development: A Source Book of Tools and Techniques, London, Department for International Development, 2003, 40. Available at: https://gsdrc.org/document-library/promoting-institutional-and-organisational-development-a-source-book-of-tools-and-techniques/ (accessed September 6, 2023). Also, The LogFrame Handbook: A Logical Framework Approach to Project Cycle Management. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2005, 7. Available at: https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/783001468134383368/the-logframe-handbook-a-logical-framework-approach-to-project-cycle-management (accessed September 6, 2023) and Capacity Assessment Methodology: Users Guide. UN Development Programme, April 2022 at https://cnxus.org/resource/capacity-assessment-methodology-users-guide/ (accessed September 6, 2023).

Development (USAID), should have a higher-level or over-arching strategy represented by the square that borders this model.

A weakness of the development literature, however, is that it generally fails to understand strategy as a broad, holistic process for analyzing the environment and applying resources to produce the desired outcomes on multiple levels. On one level, a fundamental aim of capacity building should be to improve the ability of the nation or organization being assisted to develop *its own* strategy and achieve the ends that *it* desires. At a higher level, the interveners must develop and implement a strategy for applying *their* resources and achieving *their* development goals.[50] Despite the centrality of strategy to development efforts, guidance on how to develop strategy is usually nonexistent or consists of unrealistically linear or simplistic circular models.[51]

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[50] Although, one certainly hopes that the desired ends of the intervening actors and those of the recipient have a great deal of commonality.

[51] Phrases like "designing intervention" often seem to be a direct substitute for "developing strategy" within the development literature, yet advice on how to design an intervention is just as flawed.

6

The comprehensive approach

"**C**omprehensive approach" is a term of art that refers to activities where military and civilian organizations must work together to achieve common and/or interrelated goals, usually in relation to crisis management.[52] NATO announced the concept at Riga in 2006. The summit declaration stated: "Experience in Afghanistan and Kosovo demonstrates that today's challenges require a comprehensive approach by the international community involving a wide spectrum of civil and military instruments, while fully respecting mandates and autonomy of decisions of all actors, and provides precedents for this approach." [53]

Typical examples include counterinsurgency and stability operations where the military is needed to provide security for civilian organizations to improve governance, economic development, rule of law, etc., while progress in these areas reinforces security gains and over time should eliminate the need for military intervention. Additionally, in many cases military units must perform what would normally be considered "civilian" activities due to a shortage of civilian expertise and a high level of threat to civilian personnel.[54]

According to U.S. doctrine: "Joint commanders strive to achieve a comprehensive approach (see adjacent figure) with mission partners through continuous dialogue with higher authorities, translation of this dialogue, subsequent development of desired conditions and favorable outcomes, and issuance of guidance and intent to subordinates to achieve unity of effort with mission partners."[55]

One of the factors that make implementation of a comprehensive approach so challenging is lack of universal argot, planning techniques, and processes for developing strategy. Because military leaders lean heavily on a body of guidance called "doctrine," they have a great deal of commonality in these areas. Military organizations typically have standardized routines for developing plans and strategies. NATO, for example, has publications that delineate agreed upon terms and definitions and describe how to plan, execute, and provide logistic support to allied joint operations. [56]

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52 See "A 'comprehensive approach' to crises," webpage dated 17 April 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_51633.htm (accessed December 15, 2023). Riga Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Riga on 29 November 2006, https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm (accessed December 18, 2023).

53 Riga Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Riga on 29 November 2006, https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm (accessed December 18, 2023).

54 See James G. Stavridis, "The Comprehensive Approach in Afghanistan," PRISM 2, no. 2 (March 2011), https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_2-2/Prism_65-76_Stavridis.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

55 Deployable Training Division (DTD) of the Joint Staff J7, Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper: Design and Planning, First Edition, July 2013 (approved for public release; distribution is unlimited): https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/fp/design_and_planning_fp.pdf (accessed December 15, 2024).

56 Allied Administrative Publication-6 is the NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions can be found at: https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/Other_Pubs/aap6.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

> **In 2008 [sic], NATO established the Comprehensive Approach in order to facilitate better synchronization and coordination of civilian and military activities in Afghanistan. In 2017, the Comprehensive Approach work plan was updated to enhance NATO's civil-military coordination for crisis management operations, and to help NATO allies better integrate civilian advice and perspectives into broader defense and military planning. Other activities under the Comprehensive Approach framework include sharing lessons learned, promoting civil-military training, coordination with other international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations, and sharing communications strategies with other international actors as appropriate. Much of the work being conducted under the Comprehensive Approach framework was arguably targeted toward NATO's more operational-level activities.**
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> **-- Kathleen J. McInnis and Clementine G. Starling,** *The Case for a Comprehensive Approach 2.0:* How NATO Can Combat Chinese and Russian Political Warfare, The Atlantic Council, June 2021.

Although it is common to speak of things categorically as "civilian" versus "military," there is no single "civilian" mode of planning or developing strategy that is nearly as systemic, homogeneous and coherent as that of the
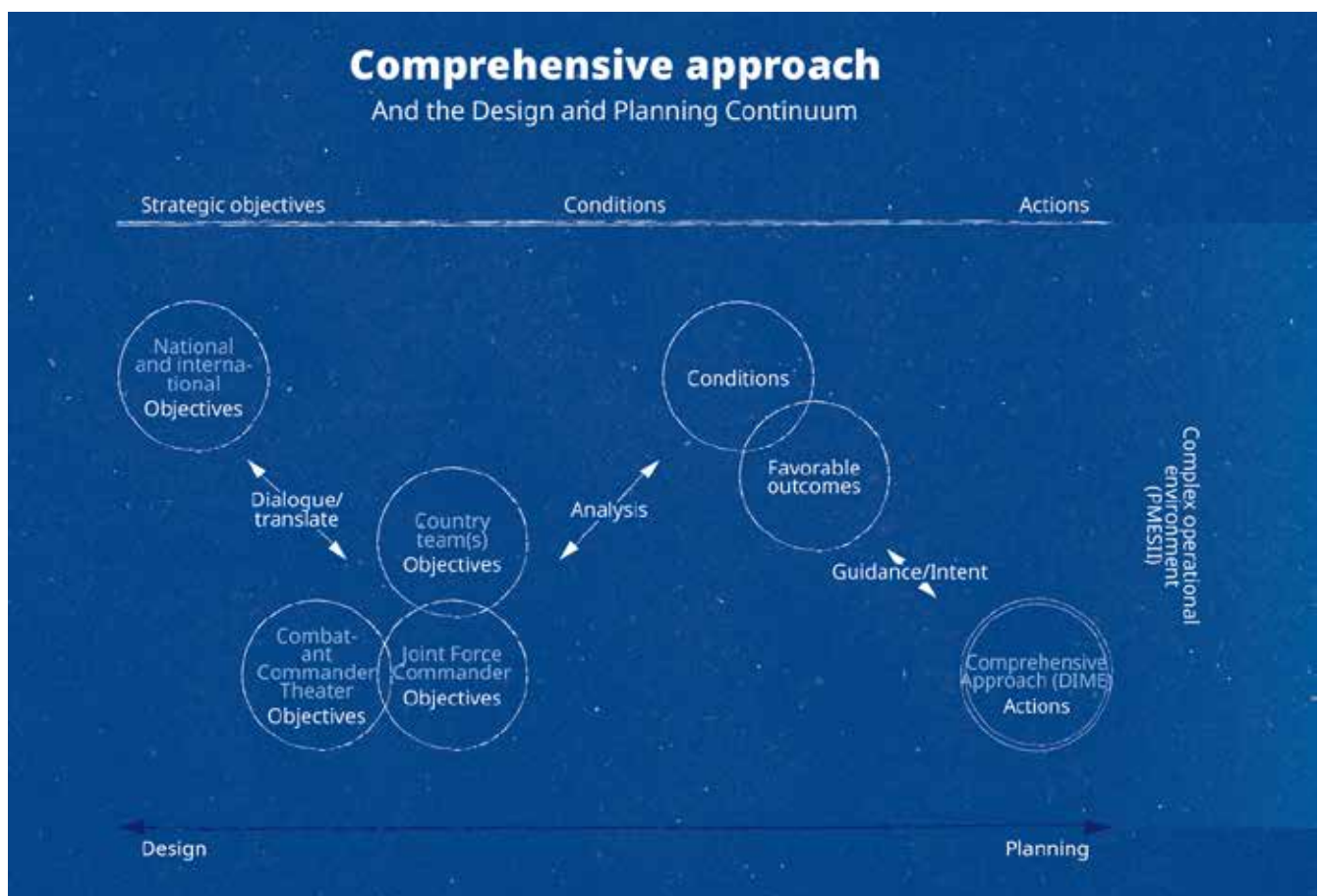
Source: Source: Deployable Training Division (DTD) of the Joint Staff J7, Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper: Design and Planning, First Edition, July 2013 (approved for public release; distribution is unlimited): https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/fp/design_and_planning_fp.pdf (accessed December 15, 2024).

U.S. military vs. State Department organizations during operations in Iraq

· circa 2008 ·

Source: Christopher M. Schnaubelt, "The Challenge to Operationalizing a Comprehensive Approach," in Operationalizing a Comprehensive Approach in Semi-Permissive Environments, *Forum Paper 9*, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, June 2009, 51, http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=79 (accessed September 6, 2023).

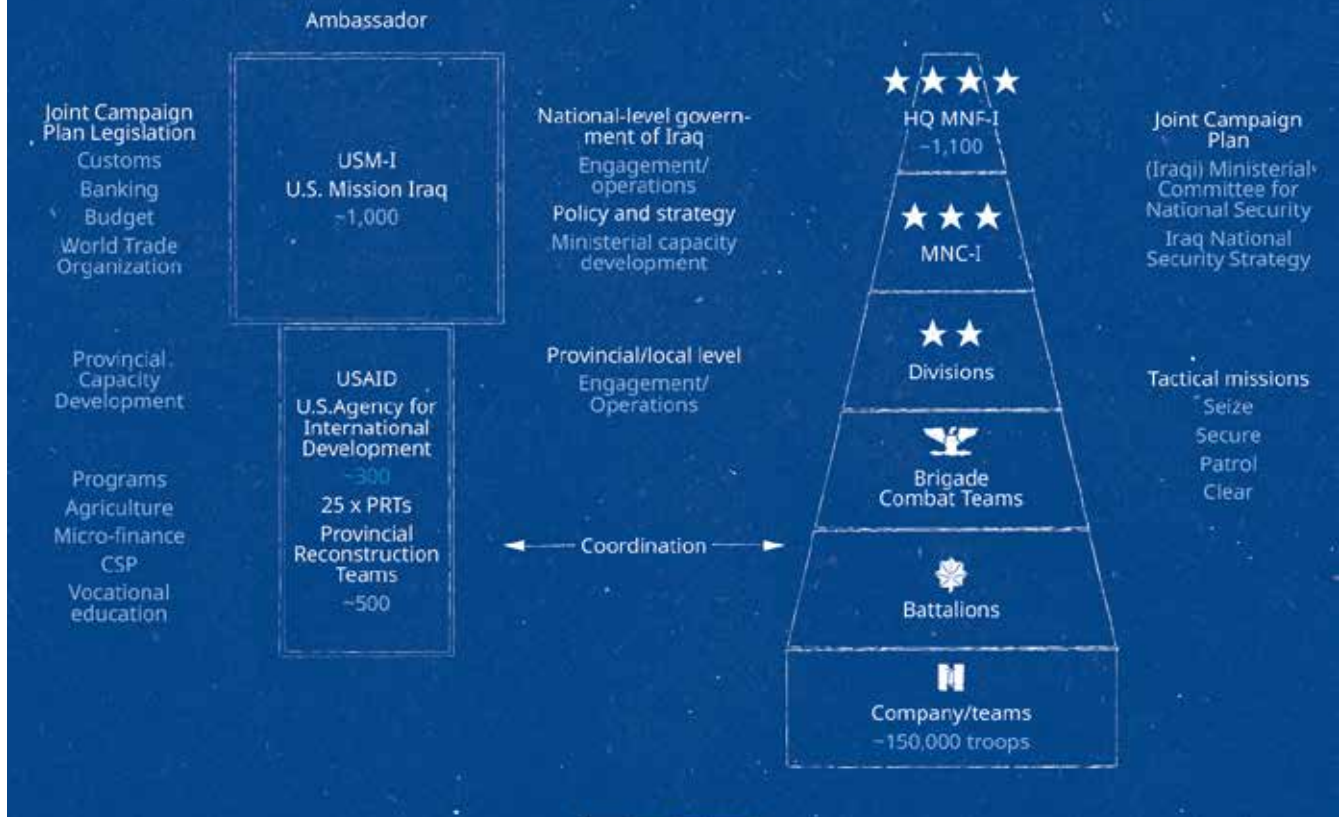"military."[57] Many civilian organizations lack a standard planning framework. Even those that have one tend to vary significantly from the methods used by other civilian organizations.[58]

A strategy may also be nested within another strategy or strategies. Furthermore, it is often difficult to distinguish between a "strategy" and a "plan." The U.S. military and many other NATO members recognize a doctrinal hierarchy of planning, wherein political and/or strategic planning guidance leads to strategy to regional and/or campaign plans, to supporting plans and orders developed by subordinate echelons (sometimes more than one level of strategies at the national then regional level). However, as the figure above illustrates, civilian partners in a comprehensive approach rarely have a hierarchical organization that parallels that of the military. Proposing a standard hierarchy of plans, therefore, is not likely to be useful.

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57 Civilian organizations often use the terms "strategy" and "planning" interchangeably. In military terminology, however, development of strategy is a qualitatively different activity that takes place at the highest echelons while planning is conducted at the operational and tactical levels. For an analysis of the differences at the operational level, see Christopher M. Schnaubelt, "Complex Operations and Interagency Operational Art," PRISM vol. 1 no. 1, pp. 37-50: https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_1-1/5_Prism_37-50_Schnaubelt.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

58 See Andy Tamas, Warriors and Nation Builders: Development and the Military in Afghanistan (Kingston, Canada: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2006), xii-xiii and 81-110.

> "A comprehensive approach cannot be meaningfully employed if the relevant actors (ranging from headquarter-level to boots-on-the ground level) lack a common understanding of method, goal and intention. Until today, there has been no such common understanding. Experiences with nation-building programs in the last decades have led to critique on the very possibilities of achieving such ideals."

-- Marenne Jansen and Eric-Hans Kramer
"The Future of the Comprehensive Approach as a Strategy for Intervention" in Eric-Hans Kramer and Tine Molendijk (ed.), *Violence in Extreme Conditions: Ethical Challenges in Military Practices*, Eric-Hans Kramer and Tine Molendijk, Editors Springer Open Access, 2023.

The challenges of implementing a Comprehensive Approach at the tactical and operational levels – or "on the ground" if one prefers – makes it imperative that the development of strategies for such efforts include all relevant stakeholders and result in a common understanding of the ends that are to be achieved.

7

Strategy and Multi-Domain Operations

NATO's emerging concept for Multi-Domain Operations entails making effective use of operations in five domains: Maritime, Land, Air, Space and Cyberspace. Despite the challenges of fitting civilian and military organizations together to accomplish common goals, the crux of Multi-Domain Operations is to enable "the orchestration of military activities, across all domains and environments, synchronized with non-military activities, to enable the Alliance to deliver converging effects at the speed of relevance."[59] Achieving the desired *synchronization* between military and non-military activities – which for purposes of simplicity can be summarized as the diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power – necessarily entails the implementation of a Comprehensive Approach.[60]

Multi-Domain Operations and the Comprehensive Approach are not synonymous, but execution of the former concept depends upon implementation of the latter. This observation means that developing strategies for Multi-Domain Operations will require collaboration with stakeholders representing the non-military instruments of power. Effective collaboration will require more than inviting their representatives to meetings: a shared understanding of the desired ends, and the ways and means to achieve them, is necessary. Developing a strategy in common will both increase organizational buy-in to carry out the strategy and improve the chances the results will achieve the common objectives of NATO and the other stakeholders.

Having covered the definition of strategy, approaches to teaching strategy, and various considerations for developing strategy, the next section describes a process for writing a strategy.

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59   See Christopher M. Schnaubelt, "Anyplace, Anywhere, Anytime: NATO and Multi-Domain Operations," *Outlook* No. 2, NATO Defense College, October 2023, https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=809 (accessed December 15, 2023).
60   The instruments or elements of national power are described in Appendix A.

Organizing for Multi-Domain Operations

Guiding principle •
Inherent element ○
Enabling function ● ('digital backbone')

MILITARY INSTRUMENT OF POWER (IOP)

Agility
Data Exploitation
Data Sharing
Data Exchange
Unity
Understanding
Inter-connectivity
Data Appreciation
Creativity

DIPLOMATIC IOP
ACADEMIA
ECONOMIC IOP
INDUSTRY
INFORMATION IOP
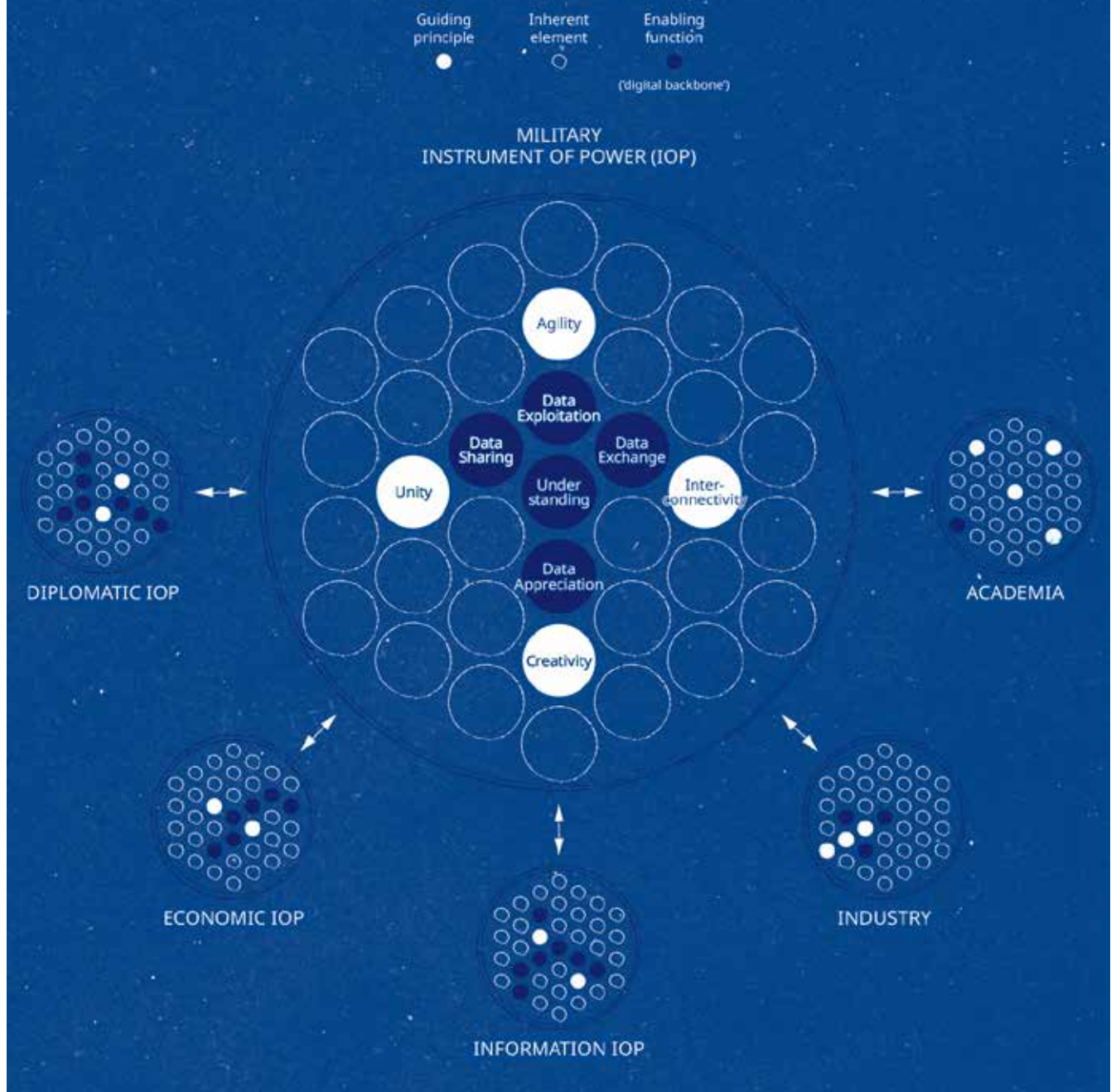
Source: NATO Allied Command Transformation, "Multidomain Operations: Enabling NATO to Out-Pace and Out-Think Its Adversaries," July 29, 2022, https:// www.act.nato.int/article/multi-domain-operations-enabling-nato-to-out-pace-and-out-think-its-adversaries/ (Accessed 30 June 2023).

Steps to write a strategy

The conditions a strategy is expected to address and the context in which it is developed will vary widely. A key variable is how much direction is given from a higher echelon or authority. This doesn't only apply to the situation of a higher military headquarters or national security policy making body. In civilian contexts, it could also pertain to a board of directors, steering committee, or donor council. The distinction between "strategies" and operational or tactical "plans" lies along a continuum, but it is certainly true that tactical planners have a great deal of guidance that is a given – almost always including specific objectives to achieve and clearly designated forces (means) they have available to use. In the case of a strategy, there will be far more components that must be inferred or developed from scratch.

The following is a generic process for developing a strategy. Other approaches may be more useful in certain contexts.[61] For example, if the developers have very clear, specific guidance and fit within a well-established hierarchy (such as a military headquarters), a linear deductive process such as the "Guidelines for Strategy Formulation" in Appendix II of *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume II: National Security Policy and Strategy* may be more helpful.[62] However, in cases where the ends must be established largely from scratch without clear direction from a higher echelon (e.g., teams of collaborative planners without a single common higher headquarters or working at the highest levels of government) the following approach might

be the best choice. This process can also be useful for non-security strategies such as those to achieve the ends of international development organizations, domestic policy makers, and businesses.

(Note: the proposed process is not necessarily linear. Strategists might vary the order in which they address the various components and perform some of them several times, thus moving "back and forth" through the process. Furthermore, it is usually iterative. Understanding is particularly likely to require multiple updates.)

Steps to write a strategy

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61 The United Kingdom Royal College of Defence Studies has a helpful chapter on strategy formulation in its publication, *Making Strategy Better 2023*. Unfortunately, it was not available to the public at the time this paper was written. In case it might be openly released in the future, the public affairs announcement can be found at this link: https://www.da.mod.uk/news-and-events/news/2022/the-royal-college-of-defence-studies-updates-strategy-making-guidebook (accessed September 22, 2023).

62 J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. (editor), Strategic Studies Institute, June 2006, 115-126, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12025.13 (accessed September 5, 2023).

Estimate the development timeline

Determine the deadlines for writing the strategy. When a strategy team is tasked by a higher echelon, it will usually be given a "due date" for completion. However, when the team is at the highest echelon or when a specific deadline has otherwise not been externally established, it should establish its own deadlines and decide how much time to apportion various parts of the development process, keeping in mind that some elements will likely need to be repeated. In a crisis situation there will be a limited amount of time available before action must begin. This constraint will restrict how much time can be devoted to various elements of the process. Otherwise, some parts – such as developing understanding – could take virtually forever. Like all elements of the process, the timeline may need to be revisited and adjusted as relevant information is obtained. This particular timeline is an internal schedule for completing the development of the strategy itself. Developing a timeline, at least conceptually, for the implementation of the strategy to unfold is also an important aspect but takes place later in the process.

Develop understanding

Gather information and relate it to conditions and actors. This element of the process attempts "to explain the qualitative relationships embedded within complex problems, including their history, dynamics, propensity, and trends [but nonetheless] recognizes that complete knowledge is not achievable, and therefore constantly questions the limits of existing knowledge and prevailing public myths or paradigms."[63] It requires more than the simple collation of facts or assumptions. The contextual factors that were previously discussed provide a starting point to list key aspects that must be analyzed. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development proposes a framework that examines the overall environment, inputs and resources, existing strategies of the relevant actors and their organizational structures, culture, people, systems, and outputs.[64]

At the most basic level, any strategy is about changing the behavior of an actor or actors. This places a premium on knowledge about the key stakeholders, their points of view, capabilities, and interactions. A good starting point might be to ask: "What can we *not* control?" This leads to other useful questions such as: What can we control? What can we influence? What conditions are more susceptible to our influence? It is important to avoid what Ben Eielson describes as the thinking which "oversimplifies complex systems and sets up the military organization for tactical success with strategic failure because the world is not as malleable as the detailed planning expects it to be."[65]

Be as explicit as possible regarding the degree of uncertainty, e.g., what is the level of confidence in estimates, information, and predictions? What do we strongly believe that we "know" versus what is an "educated guess" that is necessary to proceed in an absence of knowledge? Also, consider the construct made famous by former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld: the "unknown, unknowns."[66] At a point determined in the timeline, the process must move on to the other elements of creating a strategy. However, the development of understanding should continue throughout the strategy process to include its implementation.

Business consultants Hugh G. Courtney, Jane Kirkland, and S. Patrick Viguerie suggest a four-level framework that can help strategists recognize and deal with the degree of uncertainty they face:[67]

- Level one: a future that is "Clear Enough." A single, simple forecast is sufficient to inform the strategists. They can heavily rely on its prediction when formulating their ends, ways, and means. Such a condition is extremely rare in most contexts, especially in developing security strategies.

- Level two: a few "Alternative Futures" can be identified. These are a small number of clearly defined scenarios that reliably comprise the full set of outcomes. Although the strategists cannot predict which particular one will come to pass, they may be able to rank them in order of likelihood. The key consideration is that "some, if not all, elements of the strategy would change if the outcome were predictable." Level Two seems to best approximate the approach taken by NATO in its "Multiple Futures Project," which was intended to inform development of the new Strategic Concept that the Alliance adopted in November 2010. 68

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63   See U.S. Army TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500 (Op. Cit.), p. 15.
64   See *Promoting Institutional and Organisational Development: A Source Book of Tools and Techniques* (Op. Cit.), 18.
65   "Design Theory and the Military's Understanding of Our Complex World," *Small Wars Journal* August 7, 2011, 9, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/design-theory-and-the-military%E2%80%99s-understanding-of-our-complex-world (accessed September 6, 2023).
66   The Uncertainty Project, undated webpage, https://www.theuncertaintyproject.org/tools/rumsfeld-matrix (accessed December 19, 2023).
67   "Strategy Under Uncertainty," *McKinsley Quarterly* June 2000, 81-90. Available free with registration at: http://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Strategy_under_uncertainty_1064.

- Level three: the difference between "A Range of Futures" and level two is the absence of "natural discrete scenarios….A limited number of key variables define that range, but the actual outcome may lie anywhere within it." As is the case with Alternative Futures, the strategy would change in part or completely if the outcome could be calculated.

- Level four: "True Ambiguity" is a situation where the variables are such that "it is impossible to identify a range of potential outcomes, let alone scenarios within a range. It might not even be possible to identify, much less predict, all the relevant variables that will define the future." Courtney et al write that such conditions are "quite rare" and tend to evolve into one of the other levels over time. While making the development of strategy more difficult in many respects, conditions of high uncertainty can also present great opportunity: competitors face the same challenges and actors who take the initiative might be able to leverage a better strategy to achieve a disproportionate effect in shaping the environment.

Although strategic foresight is different than writing a strategy, in a situation of true ambiguity strategic foresight analysis can be useful to develop understanding and identify potential ways for achieving the desired ends.[69]

The greater the level of uncertainty, the more critical it is that strategists consider a very wide range of alternatives, maintain flexibility among the possible options for action, and explicitly provide for continually surveying the environment and adjusting the strategy in response to new information. It seems counter-intuitive, but the more complex the problem and the greater the uncertainty involved, the more important it becomes for the strategy to be simple.[70]

Determine what is the question or problem to be solved. Another way to view this step is to ask: why is a strategy needed? It might seem intuitive that this should the first step in the process.
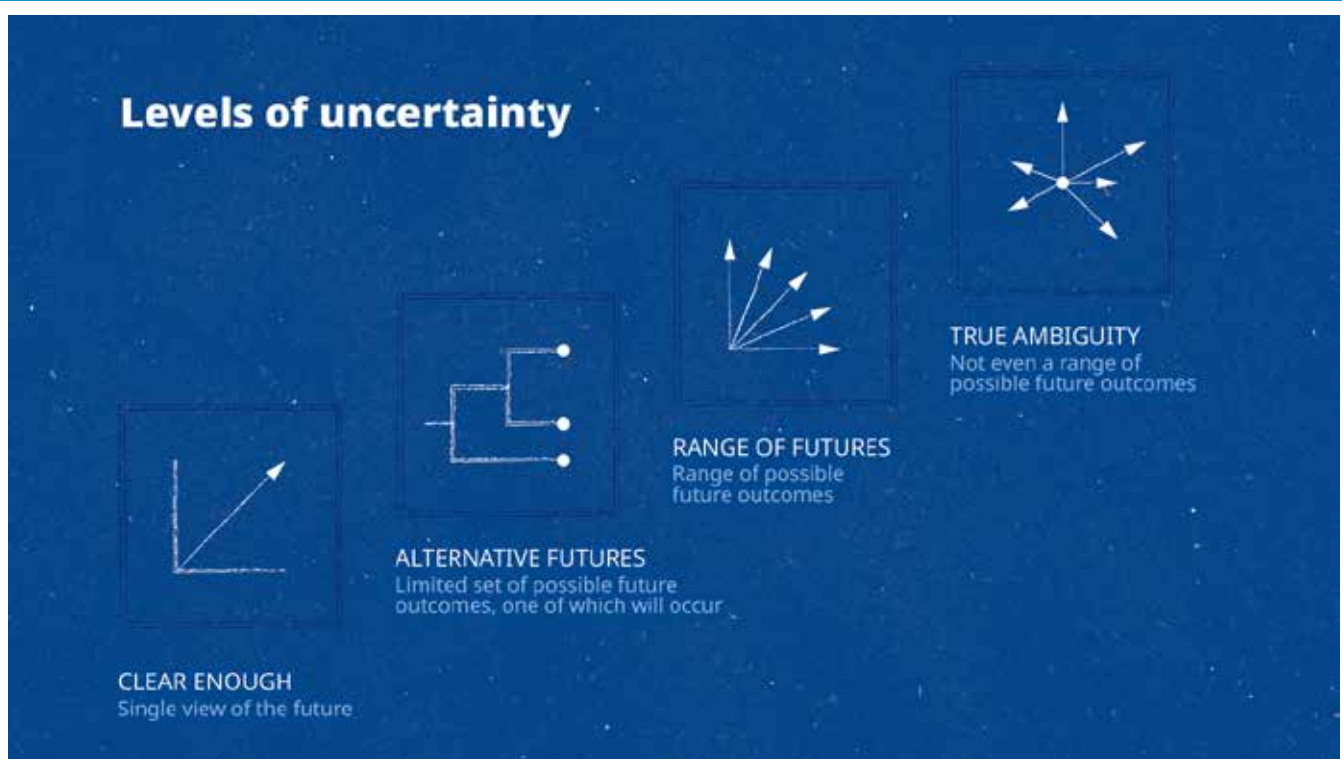
Source: Hugh Courtney et al, "Making the Most of Uncertainty," McKinsey Quarterly 2001 No.4, 44, "Exhibit: The Four Levels of Residual Uncertainty."

69   For an example on applying strategic foresight to the current Russia-Ukaine, see Andrew Monaghan and Florence Gaub, "Strategic Foresight and the War in Ukraine," RUSI Commentary, April 6, 2022, https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/strategic-foresight-and-war-ukraine (accessed January 11, 2024).
70   See Jeremiah S. Pam, "The Paradox of Complexity: Embracing its Contribution to Situational Understanding, Resisting its Temptation in Strategy and Operational Plans" in "Complex Operations: NATO at War and on the Margins of War," *Forum Paper 14*, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, July 2010, 26-45, http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=201 (accessed 3 February 2012); and Andrew G. Haldane and Vasileios Madouros, "The Dog and the Frisbee," paper given at the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City's 36th economic policy symposium, August 31, 2012: https://www.bis.org/review/r120905a.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

Frame the problem(s) and opportunities

What is going on?
Understand conditions and actors

NOW

What should the environment look like?
Visualize the desired end state

DESIRED FUTURE

What obstacles impede progress?
What solutions might help?

FRAME THE PROBLEM AND OPPORTUNITIES

What resources (means) are available?
How can they be applied (ways)?

WRITE THE STRATEGY

Source: HQ Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 5-0, May 2012, p. 2-6: https://rdl.train.army.mil/catalog-ws/view/ARI-MSCP/pdfs/adrp5_0.pdf (accessed December 19, 2023).

However, an understanding of the situation is necessary to recognize whether a problem exists and if yes, what problem. There will typically be a back and forth between these components of the process. Framing the problem will usually expose shortfalls in understanding. Achieving better understanding may result in a different framing of the problem. Strive to capture the nature of problem realistically rather than let wishful thinking dictate the approaches used to address it.

It has been argued that defining the problem is the essence of developing a strategy. In 1974, management guru Peter Drucker wrote:

> The Westerner and the Japanese man mean something different when they talk of "making a decision." In the West, all the emphasis is on the answer to the question. To the Japanese,

however, the important element in decision making is *defining the question*. The crucial steps are to decide whether there is a need for a decision and what the decision is about. And it is in that step that the Japanese aim at attaining consensus. Indeed, it is this step that, to the Japanese, is the essence of decision. The answer to the question (what the West considers the decision) follows from its definition. During the process that precedes the decision, no mention is made of what the answer might be. . . . Thus the whole process is focused on finding out what the decision is really about, not what the decision should be.[71]

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[71] Quoted in "Consensus Team Decision Making," *Strategic Leadership and Decision Making*, National Defense University, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, (undated).

Questions strategists should consider include:

▮ The external problem context[72]

- What is the history of the problem? What is its genesis?
- Who are the parties interested in the problem and what are the implications of likely outcomes?
- What caused the problem to come to the fore?
- How important is the issue in terms of key stakeholder willingness to devote resources towards a solution?
- Why is this problem now becoming salient? In other words: why wasn't it addressed earlier or why can't dealing with it be postponed?

▮ The internal context for the strategy development process

- Who is directing the creation of the strategy (a higher echelon or group of stakeholders)?
- What are their expectations? If stakeholders are multiple and diverse, are their collective interests coherent? If not, where are interests misaligned and how can potential conflict be mitigated?
- What, if any, policy guidance should shape the strategy?
- Can the ends be deduced, or must they be inferred?
- Who must approve the strategy?

A technique from the literature on business strategy may also be useful for framing the problem in the security realm.[73] S.W.O.T. analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is one approach for examining the advantages and disadvantages held by the relevant actors and relating them to one another in a useful manner. This technique is particularly valuable when the time available is short. It can be used to provide structure for a rapid brainstorming session in "low tech" conditions using an easel or whiteboard.

Draft proposed ends

Envision what is to be accomplished.
In other words, describe the outcome that is expected to result from implementation of the strategy. This element of the process establishes the scope of the strategy and gives it focus. However, as the strategy is developed the originally proposed ends may need to be adjusted as the ways and means are explored and the likely costs of achieving the initially desired ends become recognized. It may turn out that the projected costs of the means necessary to achieve the ends will exceed the perceived value of those ends.

The sources from which the ends can be determined, or inspired, will vary widely upon the situation. They are heavily dependent upon the echelon at which the developers of the strategy and their stakeholders reside, which will also relate to the amount and specificity of guidance provided to the developers. In general, the higher the level, the less guidance will be provided. The President of the United States may give guidance regarding desired ends to his National Security Council, but where does he get his (or someday, her) ideas from? Ends at this level will often be inferred from concepts of national values or national interests.

At slightly lower echelons, for example for those writing the U.S. National Military Strategy, they might – at least in part – be deduced from higher level statements such as the National Security Strategy.[74] However, this task falls mostly, perhaps exclusively, in the realm of art rather than science or logic.

How does one gain this artistic ability?
Aye, there's the rub. As is also the case with identifying appropriate means and prescribing effective ways, studying strategic theory – such as the publications found in the bibliography – and the work and resulting experiences of other strategic practitioners is a good place to start. The U.S. Institute for Peace has published a handbook called *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction*[75]

72 According to U.S. Army TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500: "*Context*: the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc. Context as described by Mao Tse Tung: 'Thus the different laws for directing different wars are determined by the different circumstances of those wars – differences in their time, place, and nature. As regards the time factor, both war and its laws develop; each historical stage has its special characteristics, and hence the laws of war in each historical stage have their special characteristics and cannot be mechanically applied in another stage. As for the nature of war, since revolutionary war and counterrevolutionary war both have their special characteristics, the laws governing them also have their own characteristics, and those applying to one cannot be mechanically transferred to the other. As for the factor of place, since each country or nation, especially a large country or nation, has its own characteristics, the laws of war for each country or nation also have their own characteristics, and here, too, those applying to one cannot be mechanically transferred to the other. *In studying the laws for directing wars that occur at different historical stages, that differ in nature and that are waged in different places and by different nations, we must fix our attention on the characteristics and development of each, and must oppose a mechanical approach to the problem of war,"* (Op. Cit.), 23.

73 See Allen Burch, "Strategy, Segmentation, and Incrementalism – A Corporate Approach", in "Towards A Comprehensive Approach: Integrating Civilian and Military Concepts of Strategy", *Forum Paper 15,* NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, March 2011, 79-80. Available at: http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=272 (accessed September 6, 2023).

74 The World Bank argues that two kinds of approaches are necessary for success in strategic and program planning: "A convergent model develops causality deductively from a desired set of strategic outcomes…. A divergent model develops [its] causal logic inductively…." (*The LogFrame Handbook: A Logical Framework Approach to Project Cycle Management* (Op. Cit.), 7.

75 Washington, DC, USIP Press, 2009, 2-9. Available at: http://www.usip.org/publications/guiding-principles-stabilization-and-reconstruction (accessed September 6, 2023).

that suggests the following list of "End States" that might be useful for many operations that will apply a comprehensive approach.

- Safe and Secure Environment
- Rule of Law
- Stable Governance
- Sustainable Economy
- Social Well-Being

Strategic practitioners, however, will probably find that these objectives need to be placed within a specific context – one which thoroughly considers the factors described above – before they are very useful as a guide for developing strategy. Unfortunately, a simple menu of desirable outcomes will rarely suffice to craft a useful statement of the ends to be achieved.

Determine the ways and means

Compare the contemporary problem frame with the vision of what should be achieved. How can we proceed from here to there? What resources (Means) are available now or will be reasonably available within the necessary time frame)? How can they best be used (Ways)? What are the options? How do they compare in terms of cost and effectiveness?

One approach to evaluating a potential strategy is by applying the standards of feasibility, acceptability, and suitability. These characteristics should be considered as potential combinations are developed. Are the means realistically available? Are the ways legal and the means worth the cost? Is it likely the strategy will actually achieve its ends?

Also, consider the role of time. How is implementation of the strategy likely to unfold? Is there a desirable pattern of execution: should implementation be simultaneous, sequential, or dependent? In other words, must everything happen all at once, in a particular order, or should those executing the strategy "wait and see" what happens before deciding upon and carrying out successive steps?

Especially when competing efforts are considered, when and/or how quickly are the means likely to become available? At the highest levels, significant resources are unlikely to be available immediately and in total. Are the key ways immediately executable, or will they require language training, acquisition of additional knowledge, skill, or abilities within the implementation force, or garnering the cooperation or collaboration of allies? As was the case in Iraq and Afghanistan, must the security forces of the supported government be recruited, trained and equipped – a process likely to take many years? And, generating forces alone is likely to be inadequate: they will also require ministries capable of providing long term management, direction, and sustaining the forces that were initially built with outside help. The status of some important inputs may be impossible to know with a high degree of certainty at the time the strategy is developed. In such instances, explicit assumptions are required but they must be realistic, and the strategy adjusted accordingly as information is obtained.[76] When assumptions involve critical elements, alternatives should be developed in case the assumptions turn out to be incorrect. For example, building national security forces in Iraq took much longer than anticipated so a "surge" of U.S. troops was implemented to help fill the gap until the size and capabilities of the Iraqi Army and police were sufficiently increased.[77]

Consider risk

Assess whether the ends, ways, and means are in sustainable balance. The degree to which the perceived cost of Ways + Means exceeds the perceived value of the Ends is Risk.

A useful aspect of our formula for strategy is that: Ends = Ways + Means + Risk. Risk is the probability that our strategy will fail to accomplish its ends. There will never be enough resources available to deal with all of the problems and achieve all of the various ends an organization desires to achieve – a reality that will drive the need for senior decision makers to accept tradeoffs. In the case of national security strategy, there are a plethora of current and potential threats in the world but a finite amount of military and other elements of national power available to deal with those threats. For development agencies and organizations, the amount of poverty and health problems across the globe exceeds the

[76] The use of assumptions here is somewhat different than that found in the Logical Framework applied by many development organizations. The World Bank defines assumptions as "conditions or factors over which the project either chooses not to exert control or does not have control" (*The LogFrame Handbook: A Logical Framework Approach to Project Cycle Management*, Op. Cit., 55). Alternatively, they may be described as "dependencies." In the approach used in this monograph, the strategist or implementers of the strategy may indeed be able to control or strongly influence the relevant conditions or factors, but they are uncertain at this point in the process of strategy development. For example, the experience of the U.S. and its NATO allies in Afghanistan demonstrated that creating host nation security forces that are sufficient in size, capability, and loyalty is a difficult and hard to predict task even if, at least in theory, one that intervening forces can heavily influence.

[77] Arguably, the ends were also reduced by placing more emphasis on stability and downplaying the desire for a Western-style liberal democracy.

funding, other material support, and expertise available to ameliorate them. The assessment of risk should help decision makers determine what tradeoffs are necessary. For a given defense budget, how much should be spent on tanks versus aircraft? In a particular development program, should more funding go to the delivery of education or building infrastructure?

It is extremely rare for strategists to be able to call upon all of the means they would like to have at their disposal. Therefore, they must consider the impact of dealing with less than optimal amounts at the optimal times. Additionally, the ways for employing the available means will often be unproven in the particular context at hand. The U.S. for example, began promulgating a national security strategy that included ballistic missile defense before a robust capability was actually in place.

The nature of complex problems is such that there will always be uncertainty and thus some level of risk is always present. However, it should be recognized that there is an interdependent relationship between ends and the ways and means such that if the means are reduced, while the ends and ways are held constant, there is an increase in risk.[78] A frequent cause of strategic failure is establishing ends that exceed the ability of the designated ways and means to achieve them. For example, the ends pursued by the U.S. in its initial strategy for the Iraq War were too ambitious prior to 2007, when the means were increased through a "surge" of forces and the ways were adjusted by implementing a counterinsurgency approach.

Reframe the problem

Consider the likely evolution of the situation in light of proposed actions. This element of the process should be conducted frequently, if not continuously. In a sense, all strategy is prediction in the form of an "if-then" statement: if we do x, the object of our strategy will do y in response. Strategists should be wary of making specific detailed predictions, and especially about relying on them too heavily, yet must consider how the enemy may react – or in cases other than armed conflict, such as domestic tax policy, how the situation may change in response to implementation of the strategy. What might be the second- and third-order effects that result from implementation of the policy?[79] Even after the strategy has been promulgated and resulting actions have begun, reframing the problem must continue to assess the effects of the strategy and the need for revision. "Red Teaming," which entails designat-

ing a separate group (preferably outside of the original developers of the strategy) to play "devil's advocate" to find holes in the strategy and/or identify unanticipated ways in which the object of the strategy may react, can be a useful technique for reframing the problem.

Finalize the statement of ends, means, and ways

Write the strategy. There is no "school solution" for the format of a strategy but the steps in this list are a good starting point.[80] There are too many possible variations in requirements, context, detail, and degree of complexity to suggest a specific format or outline. Examples of current and historical national security strategies, military strategies, and business strategies abound on the web. Length is not necessarily indicative of quality or likelihood that a strategy will be successful. In some cases a succinct, one-page statement will be best. One of the most critical characteristics is that the strategy must be clearly understood by the organizations and individuals who will implement it. How to effectively convey the desired ends and the ways and means to achieve them, again, entails more art than science.

Monitor strategy implementation and effect; revise as necessary

Determine whether the strategy is being properly implemented, is producing the expected effects, and progressing adequately towards the desired ends.
If not, revise the strategy or the plans and/or activities that implement the strategy. It would be difficult to overemphasize the dynamic, interactive nature of strategy. A good strategy will include mechanisms to see whether it is generating the desired effects and to make adjustments if the object of the strategy is not behaving as desired. There are at least two parts to the required assessment:

- *Measures of performance* examine whether the strategy is being properly implemented. In other words, are the activities directed by the strategy being

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78   Strategy is far more art than science; but even in the fine arts, an understanding of balance and proportion is usually required for a piece to be successful. A painter must decide when his piece is completed and thus the time to stop painting it.
79   In 1992, for example, Israel killed the secretary-general of Hezbollah, Abbas Musawi, with a helicopter strike as part of a decapitation strategy. However, he was replaced by Hassan Nasrallah, who turned out to be much more charismatic and media savvy, and probably a far better leader and more effective organizer than his predecessor. Thus, it is very likely that Israel inadvertently strengthened Hezbollah by assassinating Musawi.
80   One option, of course, would be to use the steps in this monograph as an outline.

conducted as expected? The World Bank describes this as monitoring "the conversion of Inputs into Outputs: Are we doing the project right?"[81]

- *Measures of effectiveness* examine whether the actions being performed have produced the desired outcomes. Or, "Evaluate the conversion of Outputs into [Development Objective] impact. Are we doing the right project?"[82]

Developing measures of performance and effectiveness is a controversial and contentious issue. It is often argued that "the most important things cannot be measured."[83] Nonetheless, a good strategy must have some mechanisms identified to judge whether it is working as intended. Otherwise, it cannot be adjusted to compensate for unanticipated changes in behavior by the object of the strategy. Potential sources for indicators of whether a strategy is working as intended include best practices/lessons learned from previous efforts which can be garnered from a study of strategy.[84]

Although intended for development projects, the World Bank suggests the following "Four Feasibility Questions" that are useful for any strategy, including military strategies:[85]

- Is it working?
- Can it be improved?
- Is there a better way?
- Is it worth it?

81   World Bank, *The LogFrame Handbook: A Logical Framework Approach to Project Cycle Management* (Op. Cit.), 49.
82   Ibid.
83   This quote is ubiquitously attributed to W.E. Deming, but I was unable to find a primary source. Also see Andrew Natsios, "The Clash of the Counter-bureaucracy and Development," Center for Global Development, July 2010 at http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1424271/https://www.cgdev.org/publication/clash-counter-bureaucracy-and-development (accessed September 6, 2023); and "The Art and Science of Assessing Iraqi Security Force Performance" in Sarah Jane Meharg, ed., *Measuring What Matters in Peace Operations and Crisis Management*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, 169-176.
84   For example, Christopher Paul et al have produced an excellent historical analysis of successes and failures in counterinsurgency efforts: *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: the Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 2010. Available for free download at http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG964.html (accessed September 6, 2023). Unfortunately, cynics often refer to "lessons recorded, rather than learned." In my experience, very few senior officers responsible for approving and implementing counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan were familiar with this report or had otherwise devoted significant study to topic.
85   Op.Cit.

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Some concluding thoughts

Developing good strategy is extremely difficult. Because of its dynamic nature, providing a simple template or "one size fits all" process is impossible. In an adversarial or competitive situation, however, there may be some comfort in recognizing that one's opponents are faced with similar challenges. Ironically, it is often easier to identify approaches that do not work than best practices.

Richard Rumelt identified four characteristics that usually equate to "bad strategy."[86] The following may provide some useful tips for things to *avoid* when creating a strategy:

- **Failure to face the problem.** If strategy is simply viewed as a problem solving process, clearly identifying the problem to be solved is an essential requirement. A strategy that fails to define the correct problem(s) is highly unlikely to achieve the desired outcomes.

- **Mistaking goals for strategy.** Some leaders believe it is sufficient to simply establish extremely high goals and then to push organizations to achieve them without providing a logical plan that identifies the necessary resources related to useful methods for employing them. Evoking the frequent and futile great offensives during World War I, Rumelt writes: "A leader may justly ask for 'one last push,' but the leader's job is more than that. The job of the leader – the strategist – is to also create the conditions that will make the push effective, to have a strategy worthy of the effort called upon."

- **Bad strategic objectives.** There are two aspects of this error: "a scrambled mess" (fuzzy objectives) that is "just a list of things to do," and "a simple restatement of the desired state of affairs or of the challenge" (blue sky objectives) that "skips over the annoying fact that no one has a clue as to how to get there." As the Ends = Ways + Means + Risk formula so nicely illustrates, a good strategy must not only define what to accomplish but also *how* to accomplish it and *with what* resources.

- **Fluff.** According to Rumelt, the "final hallmark of mediocrity and bad strategy is superficial abstraction – a flurry of fluff – designed to mask the absence of thought." Readers should find it easy to think of numerous political or organizational pronouncements that relied on the use of buzzwords rather than logic and clearly expressed concepts. If the fluff is removed or replaced with simple and easy to define terms, does the strategy still make sense?

Developing sound strategy is difficult but done properly it can be very useful to achieve national or organizational goals in a wide variety of contexts. The Ends = Ways + Means + Risk formula can be applied to both war and less violent levels of conflict, as well as domestic political policy and business practice. The preceding framework doesn't tell the reader how to "fill in the blanks" shown in the process but provides a starting point by suggesting what blanks need to be filled. The readings in the bibliography can help to educate the reader and develop the artistic abilities needed to fill in the blanks.

86   "The Perils of Bad Strategy," *McKinsey Quarterly,* June 2010, https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/the-perils-of-bad-strategy. Also see "Why Bad Strategy is a Social Contagion," *McKinsey Podcast* November 2022, https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/why-bad-strategy-is-a-social-contagion (accessed September 6, 2023).

APPENDIX

Appendix A

A few key concepts in military strategy

This monograph is intended to recommend a process for developing strategy that would be particularly useful to efforts requiring effective civilian and military integration, such as counterinsurgency, stability, post-conflict reconstruction, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance operations. With this purpose in mind, the main text attempts to be as generic as possible and minimize military-specific jargon and concepts that apply solely to armed conflict.

Yet, it is all but inevitable that civilian members of a joint strategy development team will encounter some of the following terms and concepts when working alongside military personnel. Even though the following terms and concepts might not be relevant or useful to particular civil-military endeavors, civilian strategists are likely to find it advantageous to have some knowledge of them – especially when involved in developing strategy for a comprehensive approach.

Levels of war

The levels of war are an approach for conceptually organizing the spectrum of goals, decisions, and actions during conflict and similar national security activities.[87]

On one hand, the levels are conceptually interrelated with no easily-defined boundaries between them. On the other hand, strategic theory typically asserts there is a quantum distinction between the tactical and strategic levels that is greater than the quantitative difference in terms of geographic area, amount of materiel, or the number of people potentially affected. It is probably too simplistic to say that tactics are the realm of lieutenants while strategy is in the realm of generals, but this truism gives the layperson an idea of the differences.

Carl von Clausewitz discussed only two levels of war: strategic and tactical. Although some theorists distinguish additional levels, the most common modern typology has three levels. The *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions*[88] states the following:

Tactical level

The level at which activities, battles and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical formations and units.

Operational level

The level at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or areas of operations.

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87   NB: Although the words are similar, "strategy" and "strategic level" are ***not*** synonymous. Strategies can be written for activities completely unrelated to the strategic level of war. Additionally, tactical activities can have strategic impacts. See the discussion on the spectrum of conflict and strategic compression in the introduction to "Complex Operations: NATO at War and on the Margins of War," *Forum Paper 14*, NATO Defense College, Rome, July 2010, 13-20. Available at: http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=201 (accessed December 29, 2011).

88   AAP-6(2009). Available at: https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/Other_Pubs/aap6.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

Strategic level

The level at which a nation or group of nations determines national or multinational security objectives and deploys national, including military, resources to achieve them.

The following chart from the U.S. Army Field Manual, *Operations*, shows one concept of how the levels relate to one another:

Levels of war

STRATEGIC LEVEL
- National policy
- Theater strategy

OPERATIONAL LEVEL
- Campaigns
- Major operations

TACTICAL LEVEL
- Battles
- Engagements
- Small-unit and crew actions

Source: Source: U.S Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, Operations, Washington, DC, February 27, 2008, 6-2. Available at: https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/3-0/fm3-0_2008.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).

Lines of operation

The concept of "lines of operations" is inherited from the Napoleonic era when it was geographically necessary to march an army from Point A to Point B to engage offensively in battle. Bringing land forces together at the right place, at the right time, with the right equipment and supplies was a key facet of successful generalship. The idea has expanded from the coordinated movement of military forces to embrace the coordination of different activities toward achieving a common objective. During contemporary civil-military operations, lines of operation are sometimes called "logical lines of operation" or "lines of effort," but the underlying concept is generally the same: establishing a framework to coordinate interrelated efforts that must be accomplished in sequence, synchronized, and/or performed in a complementary fashion.

The chart on next page is an example drawn from a hypothetical stability operation:

Especially since many of the tasks do not need to be accomplished in a particular sequence (they are "non-linear"), it would often be more accurate to refer to *sets* of activity rather than lines of operation (or lines of effort). However, this term is ubiquitous in NATO military plans.

Center of gravity

Center of Gravity (COG) is a concept that is greatly debated and lacks a consensus understanding despite its high frequency of use in the security literature. The original meaning of the term as used by Clausewitz meant a single, specific focal point upon which the enemy's power rested. It is typically translated as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends."[89] If the Center of Gravity was struck with enough force, the enemy would fall like a house of cards. Possible examples might be the capital city, an army, source of supply, public support, or a specific leader or leaders.

It is now common to read of multiple tactical, operational, and strategic COGs. Often in NATO strategies and plans, one's own greatest vulnerability is mistakenly listed as a COG.[90] However, such assertions run far astray from Clausewitz' original theory. In my own opinion (admittedly, a minority view among military practitioners), the hypothesis that such a thing as a COG exists or can be effectively struck is rarely – if ever – valid in contemporary conflict. It tends to resemble a search for a "magic bullet" and inhibits critical thinking at the strategic and operational level. Our enemies are unlikely to

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89   Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* Paperback indexed edition, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton University Press, 1989, 595-96. To give a fictional example: in the original "Star Wars" film, the thermal exhaust port was the COG for the Death Star.
90   Domestic public support is frequently identified as the friendly strategic COG. A ubiquitous contemporary example in U.S. military strategy and high-level planning is stating that public support is the strategic COG. At least in the U.S., however, it directly correlates with the perception of whether or not its armed forces are winning. Thus, this assertion tends to be tautological and risks blaming the public for the military's own failures. Evoking the specter of the Vietnam War, the implication is that failure should be blamed on the American people rather than the political and military decision makers who were responsible for strategies that failed.

Example Lines of Operation

Effort for Stability Operations

CIVIL CONTROL	CIVIL SECURITY	ESSENTIAL SERVICES	ECONOMIC/ INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT	GOVERNANCE
Establish police forces training	Initiate security forces training	Sewage treatment plants operating	Implement employment programs	Identify and recruit local leaders
Integrate trained police into operations	Establish national security forces	Establish trash disposal	Secure vital natural resources	Facilitate establishment of sector representation
Counter organized crime	Integrate security forces into operations	Water treatment plants operating	Repair/rebuild distribution infrastructure	Facilitate establishment of neighborhood councils
Establish judicial system	Isolate population from insurgency	Restore electrical power	Prioritize reconstruction projects	Facilitate establishment of district councils
Transition to host-nation police forces	Defeat insurgency	Reopen hospitals and clinics	Essential banking services available	Support and secure elections
	Transition to national security forces	Reopen schools and universities	Implement public works projects	
Rule of law established	**Safe/secure environment established**	**Essential services restored**	**Foundation for development established**	**Regional and local governance established**

Source: U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations (Op. Cit.), 6-14.

be such unitary actors or have such a critical weak link in an interdependent system that striking a single point will cause them to collapse.[91]

If the concept of COG is used, it should logically drive the selection of objectives and designation of the top priority (in military parlance, the "main effort") within the strategy and/or plans for implementing it. If COGs are not something the organization developing the strategy can strike at or influence, their identification tends to be an exercise in front-loading an excuse for failure.

Elements of national power

As illustrated in the chart below, these are the means for carrying out a strategy at the national level: the wherewithal a state can bring to bear to achieve its national security objects. (In the case of alliances and international organizations, a frequently used term is "national and international elements of power.")

achieve objectives, there is no consensus on a specific list. Nonetheless, the construct generally entails diplomatic, informational, military, and economic resources, frequently summarized by the acronym "DIME." Some authors expand this set to include financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (DIMEFIL) aspects or reorder them, such as military, intelligence, diplomatic, law enforcement, information, finance, and economic (MIDLIFE).[92] Expanding the list even further, Geoffrey Kirkwood and Dara Massicot argue that Russia uses "informational, diplomatic, economic, energy, clandestine, and military instruments" to exert influence in the Black Sea region.[93] It would be easy to also add cyber, lawfare, culture, social control, and space to the Russian tool kit.

Regardless of how the elements of power are defined, the critical issue for strategists is to look well beyond military means when identifying resources that may be useful to produce necessary effects and achieve the goals of a strategy.

Source: David Jablonsky. "Why is Strategy Difficult" in The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume I: Theory of War and Strategy 4th edition. J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. (editor). Strategic Studies Institute, July 2010, 9.

Like so many other aspects of strategic theory, there is no undisputed definition regarding the elements of national power. While there is broad agreement on the general concept that types of power can be categorized, and that power can be applied to protect national interests or

91   For an extended analysis of center of gravity when planning operations at the brigade level, see Christopher M. Schnaubelt et al., *Vulnerability Assessment Method Pocket Guide: A Tool for Center of Gravity Analysis,* Santa Monica, California, RAND Corporation, 2014, https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL129.html (accessed December 19, 2023).
92   See Jack Kem, "Understanding the Operational Environment: The Expansion of the DIME," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* April-June 2007, 49-53, at http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/mipb/2007_02.pdf (accessed September 6, 2023).
93   "Russian Measures of Influence Short of Force," in Stephen Flannigan et al., *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security*, Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 2020. Available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA357-1.html (accessed September 5, 2023).

Appendix B

Examples

Readers and students frequently clamor for examples of strategies. Here are three. Do they contain enough information to identify Ends, Ways, and Means?

- NATO tends to publish strategic concepts rather than strategies. The latest can be found at this link: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_210907.htm. (NATO has a Military Strategy, but it is classified.)

- The U.S. State Department Integrated Country Strategy for Iraq can be found at this link: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ICS_NEA_Iraq_Public.pdf. (Spoiler: It does not follow the formula recommended in this paper.)

- The directive to General Eisenhower for the invasion of Europe during World War II was only three pages long. It's debatable whether this document should be considered a strategy, yet it designates the ends, means, and ways for a significant effort that would eventually result in a strategic success.[94]

TO SUPREME COMMANDER ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
12 February 1944

1. You are hereby designated as Supreme Allied Commander of the forces placed under your orders for operations for liberation of Europe from Germans. Your title will be Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force.

2. Task. You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces. The date for entering the Continent is the month of May, 1944. After adequate channel ports have been secured, exploitation will be directed towards securing an area that will facilitate both ground and air operations against the enemy.

3. Notwithstanding the target date above you will be prepared at any time to take immediate advantage of favorable circumstances, such as withdrawal by the enemy on your front, to effect a reentry into the Continent with such forces as you have available at the time; a general plan for this operation when approved will be furnished for your assistance.

4. Command. You are responsible to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and will exercise command generally in accordance with the diagram at Appendix. Direct communication with the United States and British Chiefs of Staff is authorized in the interest of facilitating your operations and for arranging necessary logistic support.

5. Logistics. In the United Kingdom the responsibility for logistics organization, concentration, movement and supply of forces to meet the requirements of your plan will rest with British Service Ministries so far as British Forces are concerned. So far as United States Forces are concerned, this responsibility will rest with the United States War and Navy Departments. You will be responsible for the coordination of logistical arrangements
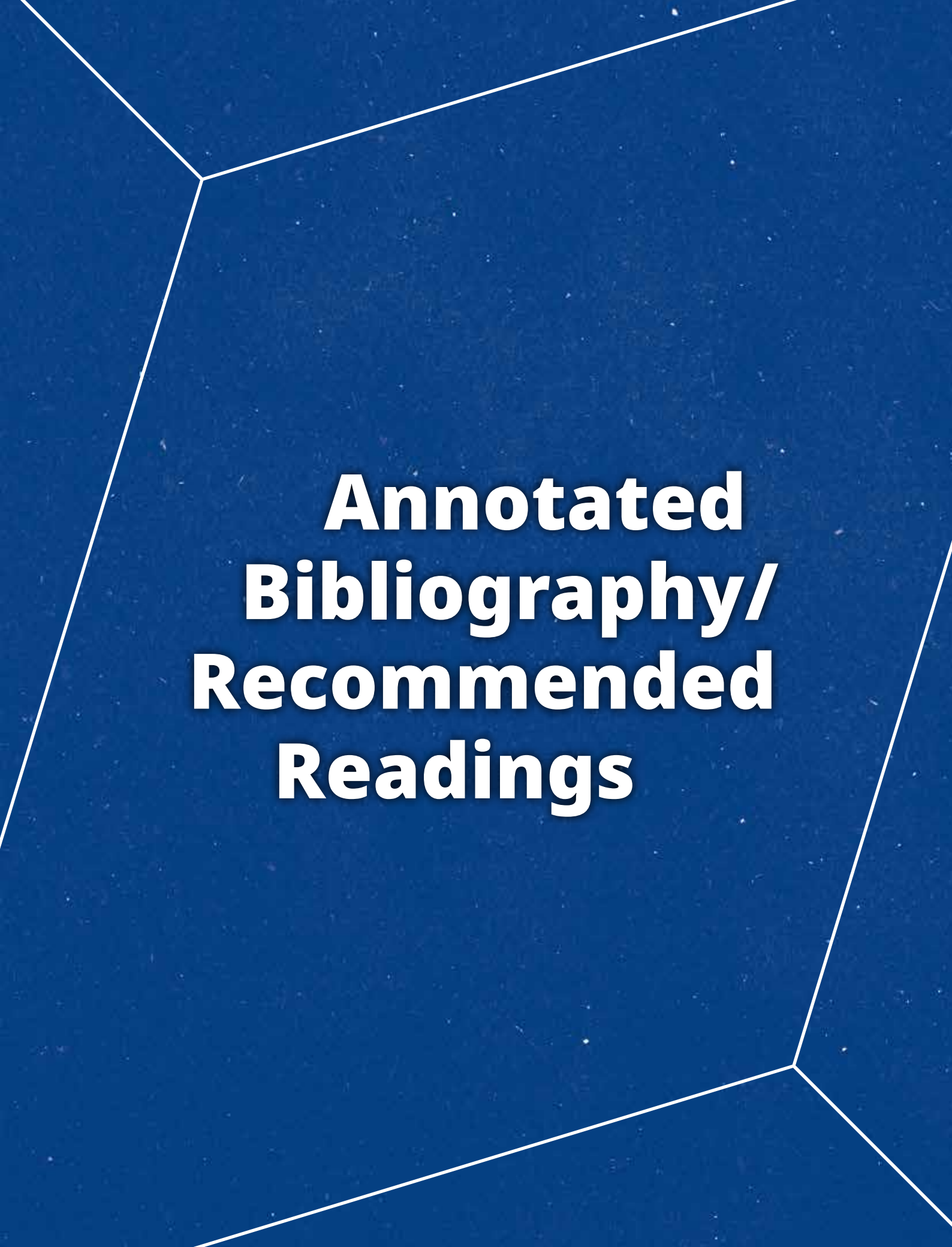
94 "Appendix II: to Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force," *The European Campaign: Its Origins and Conduct*, June 1, 2011, 453-455 https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12096.18?seq=1

on the continent. You will also be responsible for coordinating the requirements of British and United States forces under your command.

6. Coordination of operations of other Forces and Agencies. In preparation for your assault on enemy occupied Europe, Sea and Air Forces agencies of sabotage, subversion and propaganda, acting under a variety of authorities are now in action. You may recommend any variation in these activities which may seem to you desirable.

7. Relationship to United Nations Forces in other areas. Responsibility will rest with the Combined Chiefs of Staff for supplying information relating to operations of the Forces of the U.S.S.R. for your guidance in timing your operations. It is understood that the Soviet Forces will launch an offensive at about same time as OVERLORD with the object of preventing the German forces from transferring from the Eastern to the Western front. The Allied Commander in Chief, Mediterranean Theater, will conduct operations designed to assist your operation, including the launching of an attack against the south of France at about the same time as OVERLORD. The scope and timing of his operations will be decided by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. You will establish contact with him and submit to the Combined Chiefs of Staff your views and recommendations regarding operations from the Mediterranean in support of your attack from the United Kingdom. The Combined Chiefs of Staff will place under your command the forces operating in Southern France as soon as you are in a position to assume such command. You will submit timely recommendations compatible with this regard.

8. Relationship with Allied Governments--the re-establishment of Civil Governments and Liberated Allied Territories and the administration of enemy territories. Further instructions will be issued to you on these subjects at a later date.

Annotated Bibliography/ Recommended Readings

Books, Articles and Web Resources

Most of the thoughts and concepts in this monograph do not present original thinking but are instead a distillation of many books, articles, and presentations on the subject. In addition to a robust number of footnotes, works that I have drawn upon most heavily are listed here. Additionally, this bibliography serves as a list of recommended readings. In the case of relevant journal articles, with two exceptions,[95] I have chosen only those that are available online at no cost (at least as of the time this monograph was written). Thus, this bibliography is not exhaustive but should be enough to recommend a selection of key works for readers inclined towards further research.

Books

Balzacq, Thierry, and Ronald R. Krebs. The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy. **Oxford Handbooks Online. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.**

Balzacq and Krebs edited a thick and comprehensive volume with 44 essays by 50 different authors comprising more than 700 pages. The book addresses grand strategy from many different angles and presents a significant number of viewpoints. However, upon finishing this tome the reader is likely to remain uninformed about *how* to write a strategy. The pieces closet to providing a map to developing strategy are Charles Glaser's "Rational Analysis of Grand Strategy," (pp. 107-122) which on page 109 provides a five-bullet checklist of "essential components" of a grand strategy. Similarly, in the "Challenge of Evaluating Grand Strategy," (pp. 575-589) William C. Wohlforth offers four steps that might be almost as useful in developing as strategy as in evaluating one. The briefest prescription in the book comes from Peter Dombrowski's "Alternatives to Grand Strategy" (pp. 620-636). He offers:

- Assess the international and domestic environments,
- Analyze threats, opportunities, national interests, and the means of power and influence, and
- Plan on how to use the available instruments of power to achieve the objectives.[96]

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95   Originally available without charge, the articles by Huba Wass de Czege are now behind a paywall but well-worth the price.
96   Dombrowksi cites Terry Dieble, *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 24-32.

Brafman, Ori and Rom Brafman. Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior. New York: Broadway Books, 2008 (paperback edition).

This book is unlikely to be on many, if any, other strategy reading lists. However, it is a useful leavening to a body of literature that tends to be highly rationalistic – a must read for anyone who wants a better understanding of human behavior in supposedly rational contexts such as military strategy, international relations, or business. It builds a convincing argument using well-chosen examples that effectively illustrate the key concepts and make the book very interesting reading. The Brafmans do an excellent job of explaining the frequent irrational sources of choices that sometimes turn out to be extremely poor. These include value attribution, commitment, diagnosis bias, and different concepts of "fairness." (My favorite chapter title is: "In France, the Sun Revolves Around the Earth.") Rather than being just another critique of rational actor theory, this book provides some useful suggestions on how to minimize the ways in which emotional or other psychological factors can inhibit sound decision making.

Clausewitz, Carl von. On War. (Paperback indexed edition). Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

First published in the early 1800s, *On War* is the standard work on strategy for the military in most, if not all, NATO countries. Some scholars have occasionally lively debate on how to interpret Clausewitz and disagree on whether his work is relevant to contemporary conflict. Nonetheless, just as one cannot be taken seriously as a scholar of English literature without having read Shakespeare, familiarity with Clausewitz is necessary to be a strategist (at least for strategists in the national/international security disciplines). Important concepts to be found in *On War* include the recognition of friction and the fog of war. By these he means that battle is inherently confusing, and commanders must make decisions with imperfect and often incorrect information. (Contemporary adherents of a "Revolution in Military Affairs" believe – erroneously, in my opinion – that technology could allow U.S. armed forces to eliminate the fog of war and dominate the battlefield through superior information rather than the traditional elements of combat power.[97]) Clausewitz also argues that since the importance of political aims vary, the kinds of war will also vary. Not all war will be "total" war. Limited war – in terms of objectives and the costs a belligerent is willing to accept

in pursuit of those aims – is thus a common phenomenon. Perhaps his most important insight for developing strategy is that war is "a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means" (p. 87). One cannot develop an effective military strategy without first understanding the political objectives to be obtained. Therefore, he states: "at the outset of a war its character and scope should be determined on the basis of the political probabilities" (p. 584). In my view, this means fully establishing the ends to be realized and the costs (ways + means) that would be acceptable in achieving them.

Gray, Colin S. The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Laypersons may find this book challenging. Joseph Collins, no mean military theorist himself, described it as "brilliant, but often not easy to read."[98] Gray has a very specific definition of "strategy" that is close to what many others would describe as "military strategy." (He also describes the Comprehensive Approach as being synonymous with "grand strategy.") He expects his readers to have a basic background in military strategy. His introduction, for example, is a very favorable critique of Clausewitz that assumes the reader is already familiar with *On War* and does not provide much summarization of what Clausewitz wrote. Nonetheless, this is one of the best modern books about strategy. Gray uses the metaphor of a bridge to build his theory: strategy is the bridge that links politics/policy to military action. He proposes twenty-one "dicta" as the core of his theory. Among those I find most relevant to this monograph, they include: "Politics, instrumentality, and effect," "Adversary and control," "People," "Contexts," and "Tactical, operational, and strategic effect." An important aspect of his theory is that he distinguishes between "strategy" – which is a permanent theoretical construct with an unchanging nature – and "strategies" – which change in character (versus nature) and must be adaptive to contextual elements such as geography, technology, and specific adversaries.

Hanson, Victor Davis. A War Like No Other. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006.

Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War is a frequent staple in courses on international relations, war, or strategy.[99] It is the very definition of a "classic" work addressing these topics. In this history of the war, Hanson draws very heavily on Thucydides and other ancient

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97 See Christopher M. Schnaubelt, "Whither the RMA?" *Parameters* 37 (Autumn 2007), p. 95-107. Available from: http://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2384
98 Email to this author, July 5, 2011.
99 An English translation of his *History of the Peloponnesian War* can be downloaded free of charge at: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0200

sources while adding statistical analysis and new insights gained from examining how the war was fought to make it more relevant to contemporary conflict. As Hanson states: "The struggle more resembles the seemingly endless killing in Northern Ireland, the French and American quagmires in Vietnam, the endless chaos of the Middle East, or the Balkan crises of the 1990s rather than the more conventional battles of World War II with clear-cut enemies, theaters, fronts, and outcomes" (p. xv). Instead of strictly following a chronological timeline, such as Thucydides used, Hanson organizes his narrative according to major topics such as "Fear," "Fire," "Armor," and "Walls." This approach highlights the lessons that may be most relevant to today's conflict. In particular, at the beginning of the war none of the belligerents imagined it would produce so much carnage, last so long, and in the long-term prove so destructive even for the victorious Spartans. In Hanson's succinct assessment: "Everything considered wisdom at the beginning of the war would be proven folly at the end" (p. 18). Ironically, the conservative oligarchic Spartans proved much more adept than the democratic Athenians in changing their initial strategy when it became clear that it wasn't working, and this flexibility led to their victory.

Hill, Charles. Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Hill provides a unique, eclectic take on the topic by arguing that literature is as useful as history or social science in illuminating strategy, war, and statecraft because the most important and enduring questions about the human condition cannot be comprehended by rational analysis alone. It is a provocative argument and an interesting book, especially when dealing with classic texts such as those of Thucydides, Homer, and Virgil as well as more modern works such as Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. A particularly fascinating section uses Clausewitz' *On War* as a lens to analyze Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a story of strategy, war, and state formation. Ultimately, however, one is left with the feeling that other stories could just as easily be chosen (or written?) to produce opposite conclusions. While arguments based on history and social science also involve a process of selection regarding what evidence to present, good practice in those disciplines require at least some degree of arguably objective rules for sifting information. Because literature has no such bounds, its use to

support particular explanations of international relations is largely unsatisfying.

Luttwak, Edward N. The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979 (paperback edition).

The result of Luttwak's Ph.D. dissertation, this is a thoughtful and imaginative book. There is very little historical evidence to suggest that Roman emperors or the Senate consciously developed and conscientiously pursued an explicit strategy for the defense of the empire –Luttwak infers what the Roman's intended by examining their actions in the historical and archaeological records. Yet, this makes the book all the more instructive as example of strategic analysis. Luttwak argues that Rome successfully grew for centuries because it "harnessed the armed power of the empire to a political purpose" and "Above all, the Romans clearly realized that the dominant dimension of power was not physical but psychological – the product of others' perception of Roman strength rather than the use of this strength" (pp. 2-3). One might argue that the book concentrates on the tactical level, with detailed descriptions of legionary organization and individual fortifications. This is necessary, however, to support Luttwak's thesis that during this period the empire evolved through three different strategic systems: "client states and mobile armies," "'scientific' frontiers and preclusive defense," and "defense in depth" in response to changes in the external threat and internal political environment.[100]

Smith, Rupert. The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World. New York: Vintage Books, 2008 (paperback edition).

Smith makes an important argument, targeted primarily towards policy makers: modern conflict consists primarily of war amongst the people, which has a different character than industrial interstate war, and thus in many respects a different logic. Although Smith claims he is trying to "advocate a *revolution* in our thinking…our confrontations and conflicts must be understood as intertwined political and military events, and only in this way they can be resolved" (p. 375, italics added), it's hard to think of Clausewitz' nearly 200-year-old treatise as being new and revolutionary. Indeed, early in the book (p. 60) Smith directly quotes Clausewitz on the linkage of policy and war. The real problem is that policy makers often

100 Luttwak's *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, is also excellent but not listed here because it contains a great deal of detailed history that is fascinating but not directly relevant to the study of strategy. However, an additional keen insight that Luttwak draws from Byzantium is the reality of an "enemy over the horizon." Although a particular war might be won, conflict is an enduring condition. Therefore, the ability to turn current enemies into future allies may be necessary to defeat future enemies. A modern example of this at the end of World War II was the rapid integration of then-West Germany into the NATO alliance to help the U.S., UK, and France to face the emerging Soviet threat.

commit to the use of military force without having the most basic understanding of this rudimentary principle of strategy. Rather than a change to the utility of force during wars amongst the people per se, the bigger issue is probably a failure by decision makers – both civilian and military – to understand the costs of achieving aims that are related to less than vital interests. This brings us back to Clausewitz again. In total war, costs are irrelevant because a nation will spend all that it has if necessary to defeat an existential threat. In a war with limited aims, costs are expected to also be limited and the contest of wills becomes one of raising the costs to an opponent beyond the expected value of its aims.

Tuchman, Barbara W. The Guns of August. New York: Ballentine Books/Presidio Press, 2004 (paperback edition).

Tuchman's Pulitzer Prize winning book about the first month of World War I doesn't directly address the development of strategy per se, but brilliantly illustrates the dynamic nature of strategy: the plans and decisions of the enemy effects the outcome of wars and battles as well as one's own plans and decisions. Her riveting account describes how the Germans separated politics from military strategy and forced Great Britain to join the war by attacking through neutral Belgium. Furthermore, in response to French attacks in the center, the Germans also undermined their own strategy by weakening their right wing (and thus failed to implement von Schlieffen's famous plan) in a failed attempt to double envelop the French armies. Yet, the only reason for violating the treaty promising Belgian neutrality and attacking through Belgium in the first place was to ensure the right wing of the German armies was massive enough with room to maneuver that would "let the last man on the right brush the channel with his sleeve" (p. 21). On the other hand, the French remained wedded to their "Plan 17" long after it was clearly unsuitable. Oblivious to German defensive preparations and a realistic consideration of force ratios, they launched a massive counter-attack through the mountainous forests of Ardennes. Their defeat and subsequent retreat enabled the Germans to seize critical iron mines and nearly capture Paris. Meanwhile, the Russians heroically tied down substantial German forces on the Eastern Front but took tremendous losses due to incompetent leadership, poor planning, and inadequate logistics – shortfalls that could not be readily overcome by a ready supply of cannon fodder. The British also failed to shine at the onset of the war. The commander of the British Expeditionary Force refused to coordinate his operations with the French. His primary concern was

preserving his force. Rather than showing solidarity and keeping the French from defeat –the political purpose for his deployment – he unilaterally fell back several times, exposing the French flank to German attacks.

Articles[101]

Allen, Charles D. and Breena E. Coates. "Strategic Decision Making Paradigms: A Primer for Senior Leaders." U.S. Army War College, July 2010.

Allen and Coates provide a brief description of strategic decisions: they are "non-routine and involve both the art of leadership and the science of management." Furthermore, they address issues that entail complex or "wicked" problems. They are qualitatively different than tactical or operational level decisions, which usually have commonly agreed upon procedures. Instead, "Strategic decision making occurs at a key nexus of [interaction between multiple domains and stakeholders], culminating from decision criteria associated with dynamic, nonlinear, highly interconnected, and interdependent relationships." The uncertain and ill-structured nature of the problems that must be addressed makes establishing a standard methodology for making strategic decisions difficult, if not impossible. To help leaders understand the range of processes and approaches they can draw upon when faced with strategic problems, Allen and Coates provide descriptions and analyses of eight decision making models: Rational, Bounded-Rationality, Incremental, Mixed-Scanning, Polis, Garbage Can, Bargaining, and Participative. Each of these has strengths and weaknesses. None is ideal but depending on the context some may serve as suitable guides for leaders seeking a process they can employ.

Bartholomees, J. Boone Jr. "A Survey of the Theory of Strategy" in *The U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume I: Theory of War and Strategy* 4ᵗʰ edition. J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. (editor). Strategic Studies Institute, June 2012, pp. 13-44.

Bartholomees begins with a summary of the definitional problem. He notes that the "military community has an approved definition" but in the broader national security

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[101] This selection is admittedly U.S. Army-centric. However, aside from my own bias, it is simply true that the U.S. Army War College has available online without charge the largest collection of articles and papers related to strategy located in one place. The Air University of the U.S. Air Force also has an excellent web page on the broader topics of "military theory, theorists, and theory" at: https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AUPress/Subjects/ (accessed September 5, 2023).

arena "there is no consensus on the definition of strategy…." His own view is that "strategy is simply a problem solving process…that asks three basic questions: what is it I want to do, what do I have or what can I reasonably get that might help me do what I want to do, and what is the best way to use what I have to do what I want to do?" After brief consideration of the tests for a strategy (suitability, acceptability, and feasibility) and some ways it can be categorized either conceptually (declaratory, actual or ideal) or by the pattern of execution (sequential, simultaneous, or cumulative), he provides a readable and comprehensive look at the major theories about strategy. The authors surveyed include Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Jomini, Beaufre, Luttwak, Van Creveld, and many others.

Burch, Allen. "Strategy, Segmentation and Incrementalism – A Corporate Approach" in *Towards a Comprehensive Approach: Integrating Civilian and Military Concepts of Strategy*, *NDC Forum Paper #15*. **Christopher M. Schnaubelt (editor). NATO Defense College, March 2011, pp. 70-90.**

Developing a successful strategy for implementing a comprehensive approach will require integrating both "military" and "civilian" points of view. Burch's paper demonstrates the value of cross-fertilization amongst the varying civilian and military approaches to strategy. There are many articles on business strategy that draw upon principles of military strategy.[102] Burch, however, is especially noteworthy because he specifically applies business approaches to military strategy rather than vice versa. He provides an overview of successful examples of strategy within the consumer products goods industry and suggests ways in which some of the lessons from business strategy might be applied to NATO efforts in Afghanistan. The methods of segmentation, "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)" analysis, and incrementalism could provide useful new ways of looking at ongoing operations in Afghanistan as well as future counterinsurgency and stability missions.

Crowl, Philip A. "The Strategist's Short Catechism: Six Questions Without Answers." **Reprinted from** *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History,* **No. 20, October 6, 1977, pp. 1-14.**

Crowl's article has some overlap with other articles listed here, and the opening section on the value of studying history is a bit ponderous. However, his six questions are excellent analytical tools for developing strategy and each is illustrated by pithy examples that demonstrate the

possible consequences of failing to adequately consider the problem and opportunities being faced. The six questions are: (1) "What it is about…. What specific national interests and policy objectives are to be served by the proposed military action?" (2) What are "the proper methods of fighting the war once it starts?" (3) "What are the limits of military power?" (4) "What are the alternatives?" (5) "How strong is the home front?" and (6) "Does today's strategy overlook points of difference and exaggerate points of likeness between past and present?"

Gaddis, John Lewis. "What is Grand Strategy?" (Lecture), February 26, 2009.

This excellent piece was the keynote address given by Gaddis to a conference at Duke University on American Grand Strategy. It opens with a vignette that illustrates an apparent lack of strategic thinking within the Clinton administration when pursuing a policy of NATO enlargement in 1998 (pp. 2-3). He provides other examples of why strategy is important and gives an overview of the approach taken by Gaddis and colleagues in teaching a course on strategy at Yale University. While most of the strategy discussed by Gaddis concerns national security, it is a decidedly not an approach typically found within Pentagon manuals and PowerPoint briefings. Indeed, he writes that "…strategy need not apply only to war and statecraft: it's potentially applicable to any endeavor in which means must be deployed in the pursuit of important ends" (p. 7).

Jablonsky, David. "Why is Strategy Difficult" U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy, July 1, 2006, pp. 115-12.

(NB: If you are going to read only two articles from this bibliography, this and H. Richard Yarger's "Toward a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model" are the ones to choose.) After the briefest mention of Lykke's framework for strategy as being the linkage of ends (or objectives) with ways (or concepts) and means (or resources), Jablonsky provides a succinct review of Clausewitz' conceptions of the policy continuum that links policy, strategy and tactics; and the "remarkable trinity" consisting of the government, the military, and the people. He then draws brief lessons from World War I to illustrate how the advent of modern war fighting technology altered the interrelation of the government-military-people trinity in ways that Clausewitz did not anticipate, arguing that technology resulted in "self-defeating offensive strategies." The impact of technology necessitates expanding the continuum of war – envisioned by Clausewitz as consisting only of strategy

102 For example, the article noted further below by Richard Rumelt begins with an engaging vignette of Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar.

56 ——— **How to write a strategy**

and tactics – to add an operational level to link strategy and tactics. Jablonsky concludes his article with the figure of a large arrow of NATIONAL STRATEGY, illustrating a horizontal plane of the economic, psychological, political, and military elements of national power, while the military element also has a vertical continuum of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war (reprinted above in the annex's section on the elements of power). He also quotes Admiral Henry Eccles on the complexity of national strategy: "Because these various elements of power cannot be precisely defined, compartmented, or divided…it is normal to expect areas of ambiguity, overlap, and contention about authority among the various elements and members of any government" (p. 9). While one must acknowledge that any model or chart has limits, is it glaringly obvious that missing from the national strategy arrow is any notion of relevant continuums below the non-military elements or the interactions amongst the various elements.

"National Power" in U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy, July 1, 2014. pp. 101-118.

In this article, Jablonsky begins by defining power at the most basic level as being able to cause others to behave in a manner conducive to one's own objectives: "At the national level, this influence is based on relations between nation-state A and another actor (B) with A seeking to influence B to act in A's interest by doing x, by continuing to do x, or by not doing x." He next describes the importance of context – explaining that "The question should always be: power over whom, and with respect to what?" – touches upon the difference between potential and actual power, and highlights what should be obvious but often missed: "National Power is relative, not absolute."[103] The bulk of the article analyzes the various factors that help to determine national power. These are organized according to natural and social factors, although he notes that a sharp distinction between these two categories is impossible to establish. The key factors analyzed include geography, population, natural resources, economic capacity, military strength, political organization, psychological components such as national will, character, and integration, and information/communications capabilities.

Rumelt, Richard. "The Perils of Bad Strategy." *McKinsey Quarterly*, June 2011.

Illustrating how much strategy for war can inform strategy for business (and vice versa), Rumelt begins this very readable article with a short vignette regarding British Admiral Horatio Nelson's strategy for his outnumbered fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar. He then describes what he calls "bad strategy" and provides a list of dysfunctional behaviors that are often found. These include: Failure to Face the Problem (detailed plans that have extensive information yet to do not address the core issue(s) that needs to be tackled), Mistaking Goals for Strategy (making a list of desired outcomes without a realistic plan to identify and dedicate resources necessary to achieve those goals), Bad Strategic Objectives (a "dog's dinner of goals" rather than a thoughtful statement of the most important things that much be achieved), and Fluff ("superficial abstraction – a flurry of fluff –designed to mask the absence of thought). Rumelt concludes by providing a "kernel of good strategy," three characteristics that form the backbone of a good strategy: A diagnosis, a guiding policy, and coherent actions.

Stolberg, Alan G. "Crafting National Interests in the 21st Century" in U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Interests, Jun. 1, 2012, pp. 13-26.

A significant difference between "developing strategy" and "planning" is that during the latter, the starting point is usually deductive: one analyzes the specific and implied tasks assigned by a higher echelon or authority to determine the outputs or outcomes the echelon doing the planning is supposed to achieve. For plans, the means are also typically designated as part of the tasking to start planning. Strategy, however, often begins with a blank slate: the outputs or outcomes must be inferred with little or no guidance from a higher echelon; indeed, the highest echelon (e.g., the U.S. National Security Council or the North Atlantic Council) may be the one developing the strategy. Identifying national interests (or in a multi-lateral alliance such as NATO, the process might begin with identifying the common interests or values of the Alliance) is the starting point of the process in nearly every proposed approach to crafting national security strategy. Stolberg efficiently provides a brief definition of national interests and reviews debates about their nature, including "realism" vs. "morality" and summarizes one of the standard typologies that categorize interests by their intensity: survival, vital, important, and peripheral.

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[103] Relative nature also applies to the ability to bring national power to bear against an opponent. A contemporary example is the error of Vladimir Putin, as well as many Western analysts, in believing the Russia would quickly overrun Ukraine because of Russia's far larger armed forces, population, and economy.

Troxell, John F. "Military Power and the Use of Force" in Vol. I: Theory of War and Strategy, June 1, 2012, pp. 217-242.

Troxell begins by advising the reader that: "As important as military power is to the functioning of the international system, it is a very expensive and dangerous tool of statecraft…." He then describes several tasks that military action can be assigned in pursuit of a political objective. The "purest" use of military power is to "physically defeat an adversary" and "eliminate an adversary's ability to choose course of action." It can also be used to coerce, which is to "cause an adversary to change his potential or actual course of action." Coercion can be subdivided into deter, which is to convince an opponent not to take a particular action because the costs and risks would exceed the perceived benefit, and compel – forcing an opponent to engage in certain behavior. Two other effects that military power can produce are to reassure and dissuade. The summary that Troxell provides is good, but would have been better if he had tied it into Rupert Smith's arguments in *The Utility of Force* or otherwise been more explicit about the fact that there are only so many effects that can be achieved through military action and thus in many instances its ability to produce the desired political outcome is inherently limited. The second half of the paper is a brief but excellent analysis of various arguments during the past three decades about when to use force, particularly the so-called "Weinberger Doctrine," and a review of the debate about legitimacy and multilateralism.

Wass de Czege, Huba. "War with Implacable Foes: What All Statesmen and Generals Need to Know" *Army* 56, no. 5 (May 2006), pp. 9-14.

This article provides a brilliant distillation of Clausewitz and applies the key premises towards developing a strategy to defeat a determined enemy. Based upon the critical axiom, "It is the loser who decides that he has lost," Wass de Czege argues that prudence dictates the pursuit of war along "two complementary lines." One of these should attempt "to influence the *will* and decisions of enemy political leaders." These efforts could include threats, "shock and awe" effects through the use of airpower and other standoff weapons to attack critical nodes and troop concentrations, and – although not specifically mentioned in this article – non-military tools such as economic sanctions and international regimes to weaken the legitimacy of the enemy regime. According to Wass de Czege, however, "Applying military power for psychological and political effect is simple to conceive, but it is very difficult to obtain predictable results, no matter

how much power is applied, or how precisely the blows are delivered. It is difficult to judge how the enemy will react to extreme acts of violence and military threats." Therefore, although efforts to influence the enemy's will are worthwhile, the other arm of the strategy must be the deployment of substantial ground forces that can close with and engage the enemy. When fighting an implacable foe, "winning will always require eliminating the enemy's option to decide how and when the war ends." Wass de Czege makes a strong argument that this is something that cannot be accomplished with standoff and precision weapons alone.

"On Policing the Frontiers of Freedom" *Army* 56, no. 7 (July 2006), pp. 14-22.

This article is the bookend for the preceding one. In it, Wass de Czege posits a dichotomy of military operations that require the use of force: warring and policing (consensual, unopposed humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions are not considered in this spectrum). While there is some overlap, he says each has its own fundamental logic: "we *make war* on an *enemy*, and we *police* a *problem*." Policing usually entails complex social or "wicked" problems, the solution of which "requires restoring a bargain in which the people provide support and soldiers and marines provide a safe environment, not only for the people, but for the nonmilitary actors who really have the expertise and means to deal with the root social causes." A key difference from warring is that "War implies ending when the adversary yields overtly. Policing with military forces implies an ending when civil authorities can contain the danger of violence through normal processes – civil police, courts, and prisons." War does not end until *the loser* has decided he has lost. In policing, *the stronger side* determines when the problem has been reduced to a manageable level. Although troops may be conducting both warring and policing in the same location, the distinction between the two activities has critical implications for the employment of military forces. Among them, in policing "The lives of innocent foreign civilians are valued as much as those of the soldiers and marines protecting them."[104] In war, seizing the initiative is imperative, rapid action is premium, and reconnaissance by fire is often necessary and acceptable. During policing, on the contrary, in many cases doing nothing other than "getting your bearings and sensing the mere impact of your outfit's imperial and seemingly ubiquitous presence is enough." Therefore, Wass de Czege argues that "How politicians define the problem of a nonstate adversary [i.e. warring or policing] is an important strate-

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[104] I have argued elsewhere that a paradox of using military force for humanitarian purposes is that when less than vital national interests are involved, avoiding friendly casualties becomes an imperative and inadvertently results in greater risk to the civilians who are supposed to be protected. See "The Limits of Military Force," *The International Herald Tribune* May 19, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/opinion/19iht-edschnaubelt19.html (accessed September 6, 2023).

gic decision…. Being able to define the problem in terms other than war is a privilege reserved to the strong, and such decisions are profoundly political."

> **Yarger, H. Richard. "Toward a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model"** in Vol. I: Theory of War and Strategy, June 1, 2012.

(NB: If you are going to read only one article from this bibliography, this is the one to choose.) In a mere six pages, Yarger describes the model developed by Arthur Lykke that has been used at the U.S. Army War College for more than 20 years. It is almost impossible to sensibly pare down his article further, but in a nutshell: "Strategy is all about *how* (way or concept) leadership will use the *power* (means or resources) available to the state to exercise control over sets of circumstances and geographic locations to achieve *objectives* (ends) that support state interests." Thus, "strategy = ends + ways + means" and the degree to which ends, ways, and means are out of balance equals risk. Finally, Yarger posits that the standard for assessing a strategy is whether it is suitable, feasible, and acceptable.

Web Resources

In addition to the specific works cited above, several e-journals and web pages present up-to-date pieces and discussions on strategy and strategic topics.

These include:

> **IISS - International Institute for Strategic Studies**
> - https://www.iiss.org/

> **Journal of Strategic Studies**
> - https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/fjss20

> **Military Strategy Magazine**
> - https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/

> **Strategic Studies Institute**
> - https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/

> **The Strategy Bridge**
> - https://thestrategybridge.org/